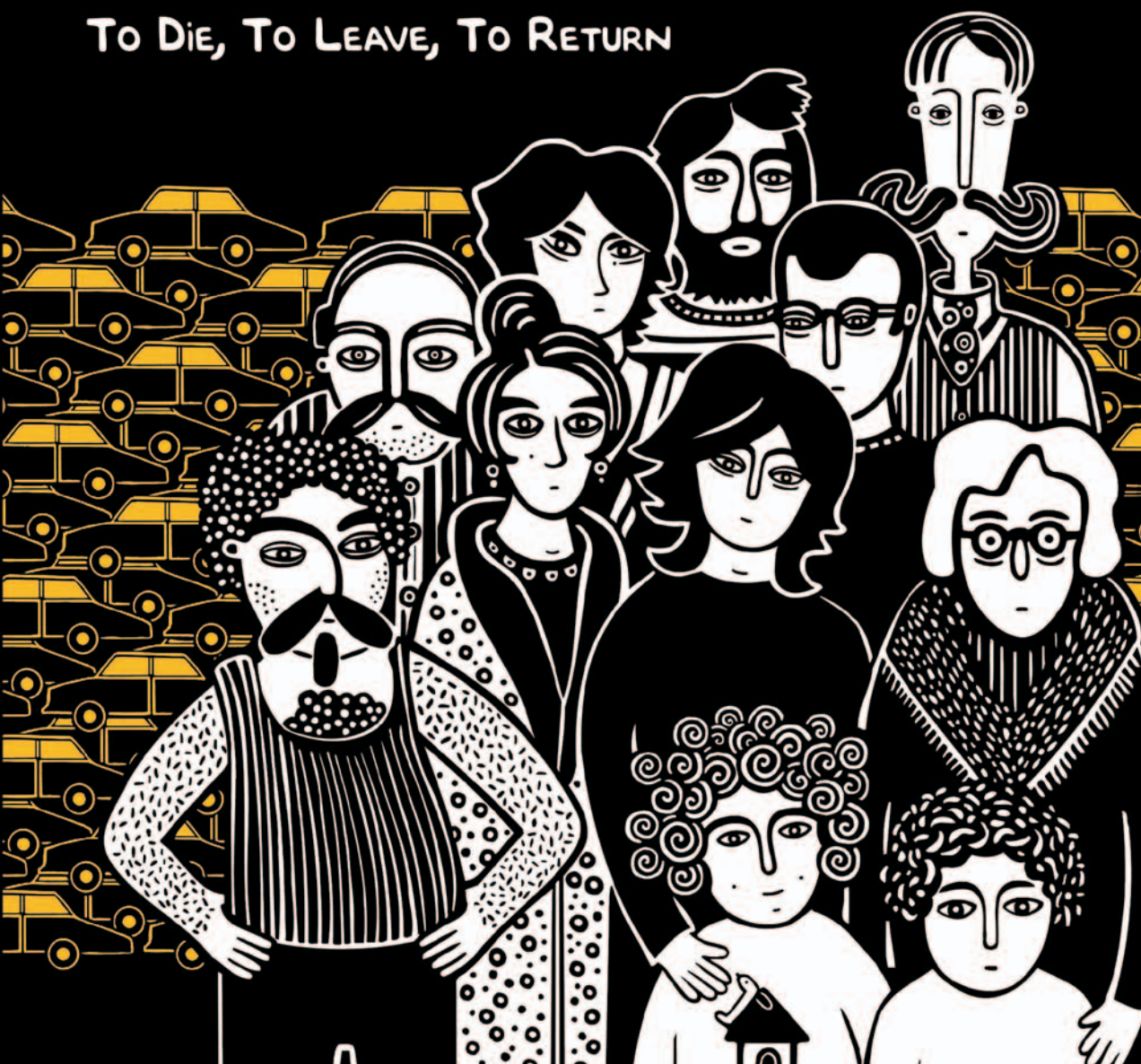
Zeina Abirached

A Game for Swallows

To Die, To Leave, To Return



When Zeina was born, the civil war in Lebanon had been going on for six years, so it's just a normal part of life for her and her parents and little brother. The city of Beirut is cut in two by bricks and sandbags, threatened by snipers and shelling. East Beirut is for Christians, and West Beirut is for Muslims. When Zeina's parents don't return from a visit to the other half of the city, and the bombing grows closer, the neighbors in her apartment house create a world indoors for Zeina and her brother, where they can share cooking lessons and games and gossip. Together they try to make it through a dramatic evening in the one place they hoped they would always be safe—home.

Zeina Abirached, born into a Lebanese Christian family in 1981, has collected her childhood memories of Beirut in a warm story about the strength of family and community.

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A GAME FOR SWALLOWS

TO DIE, TO LEAVE, TO RETURN

ZEINA ABIRACHED

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FRENCH VOICES

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QUOTATIONS FROM EDMOND ROSTAND'S *CYRANO DE BERGERAC* ADAPTED FROM THE 1899 TRANSLATION BY GLADYS THOMAS AND MARY F. GUILLEMARD.

MAP P. 8 ©LAURA WESTLUND/INDEPENDENT PICTURE SERVICE

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INTRODUCTION

A song I used to love back in 1969 asks what war is good for. The answer: absolutely nothing. My politics are pretty simple: people have the right to love one another, regardless of gender; basic health care is a human right; women have the right to control over their own bodies; it is unfair for 1 percent of the population to have all the wealth while 99 percent have nothing; and war is bad.

But I don't understand wars. OK, I get the reasons for World War II and the American Civil War, but I will never understand World War I. What was Bosnia all about? Why did Iran and Iraq fight with each other? And what was the reason for the Lebanese Civil War? Are there *justifiable* reasons for wars?

From my untutored viewpoint, a bunch of old guys send a bunch of young guys out to kill and die while ordinary people like you and me, caught in the middle, simply try to survive. And sometimes, in the course of surviving, we do beautiful things.

In a crisp, accessible black-and-white style, reminiscent of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Zeina Abirached shows us both the horror and the beauty that can emerge from war. It's 1984 in East Beirut. Very young Zeina has never known anything but war. She lives in the middle of the war zone with her parents and her even younger brother. The family has closed off most of their apartment and moved into the foyer, the only safe room in the house. They've dragged in their mattresses, their chairs and rugs. Hanging on the wall is the family heirloom, a tapestry depicting Moses and the Hebrews fleeing Egypt. The tapestry is separated into panels, like the comic page that contains it: a comic within a comic.

Zeina's parents have gone out to visit her grandmother, who lives a few blocks away—and they have not returned, although they left for home an hour ago. And here's where the beauty comes in.

The neighbors all filter down in ones and twos, to stay with the kids. Soon, nine people fill the tiny foyer. Some of them have lost loved ones to the war. Some of them are preparing to flee to Canada, like Moses and the Hebrews in the tapestry.

They drink strong Turkish coffee and listen to the bombardment outside. Anhala, an old woman, makes a Lebanese cake called *sfouf* that sounds delicious. Should the worst happen, these kids will be loved and cared for!

As I write this, the newspapers and the Internet are full of tributes to Marie Colvin, the journalist who was killed by shelling in Syria on February 22, 2012, along with a French photojournalist named Rémi Ochlik. With her black eye patch, which she wore after losing her eye to shrapnel while covering conflicts in Sri Lanka in 2001,

she cut a dashing figure. She always seemed to me like the heroine of a comic book. The *Washington Post* describes her as risking her life "to cover wars from the perspective of ordinary people, particularly women and children." In other words, people like Zeina and her neighbors.

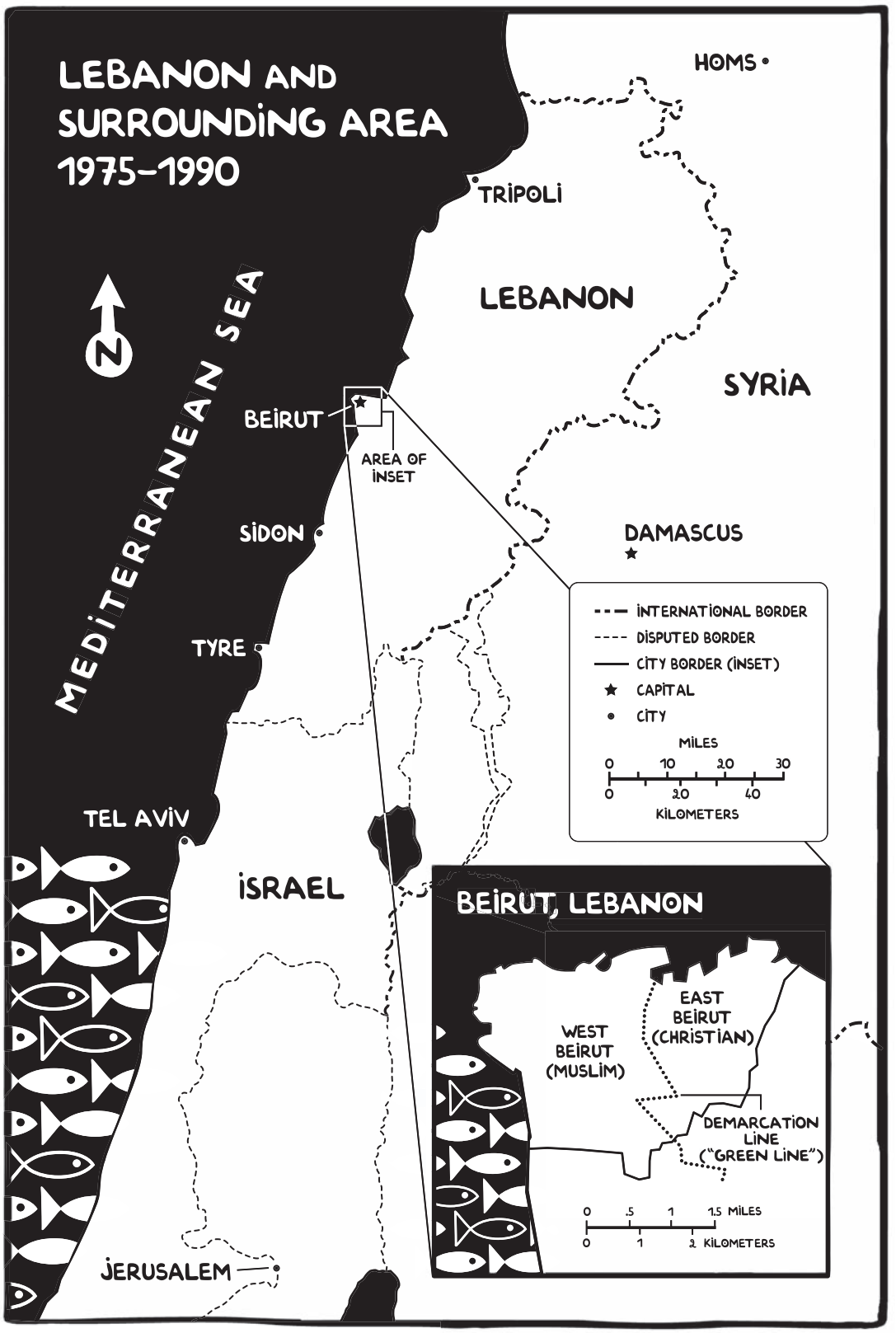
Here is an excerpt from Colvin's last dispatch, to the *Sunday Times* of London three days before she was killed:

> *They call it the widows' basement. Crammed among makeshift beds and scattered belongings are frightened women and children trapped in the horror of Homs, the Syrian city shaken by two weeks of relentless bombardment. . . .*
>
> *Snipers on the rooftops . . . shoot any civilian who comes into their sights. Residents were felled in droves in the first day of the siege . . . but have now learnt where the snipers are and run across junctions where they know they can be seen. . . .*
>
> *No shops are open, so families are sharing what they have with relatives and neighbours.*

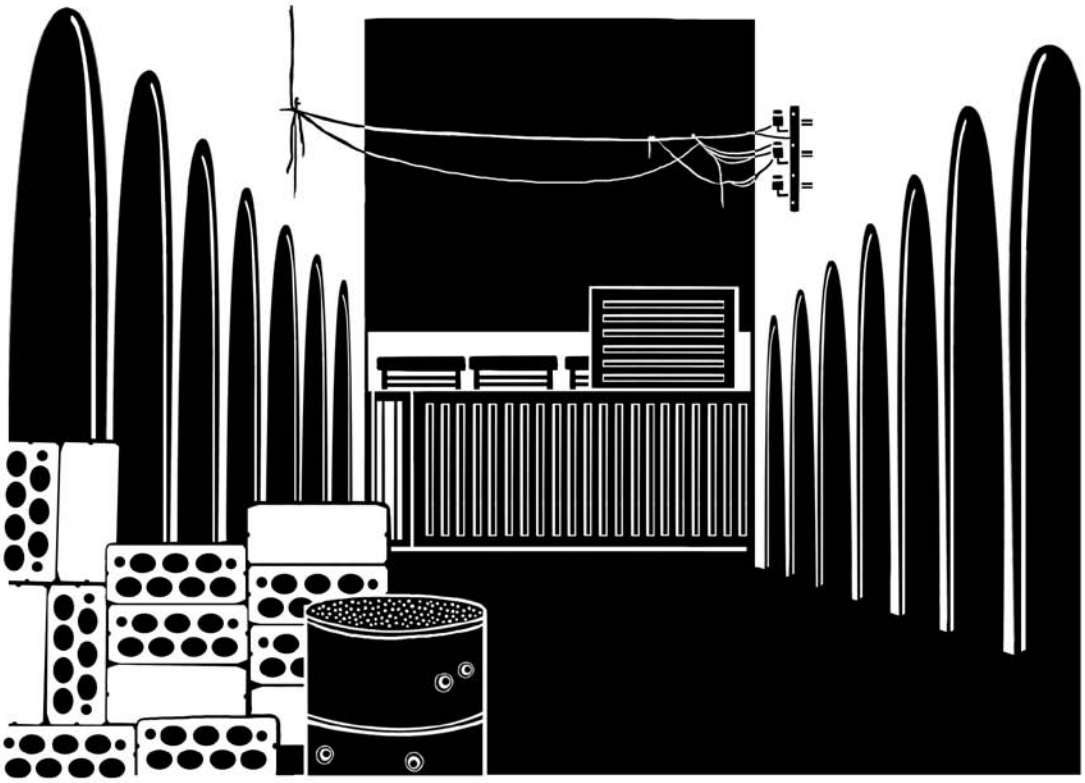
The story sounds so much the same as Zeina's.

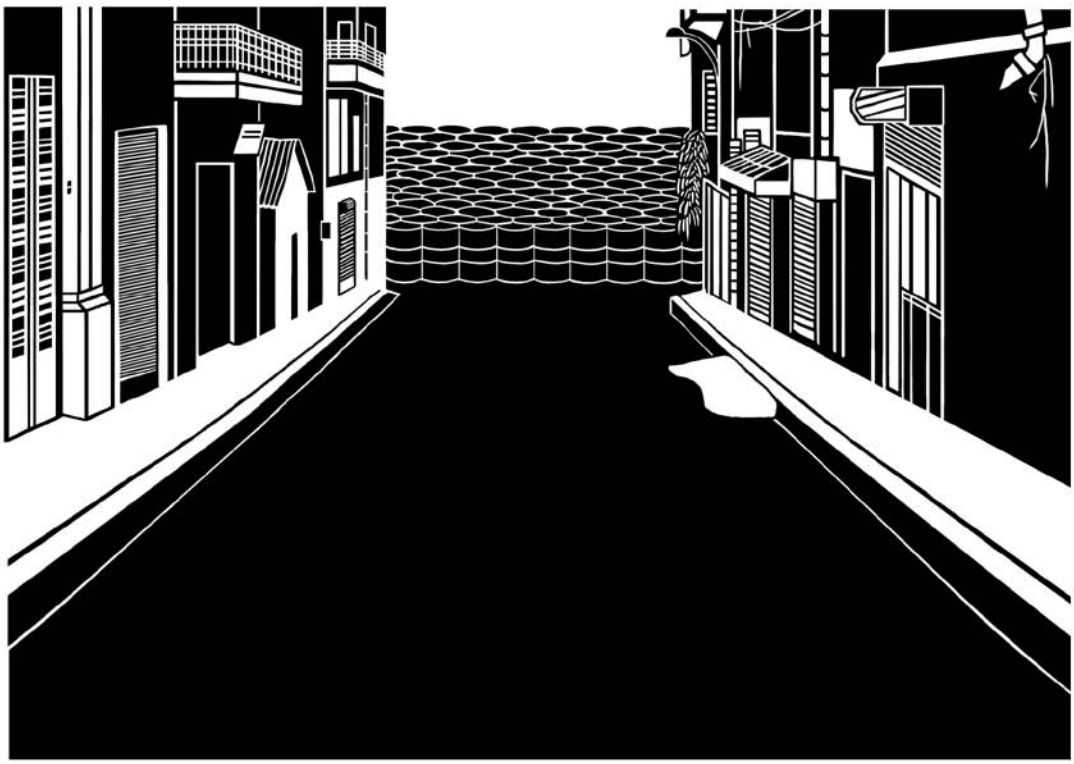
I found a recipe for *sfouf* on the Internet. It looks pretty easy to make, but you need semolina flour and turmeric. I shall walk two blocks to the supermarket for the flour and spice, and nobody will shoot at me. Doesn't everybody deserve to live like that?

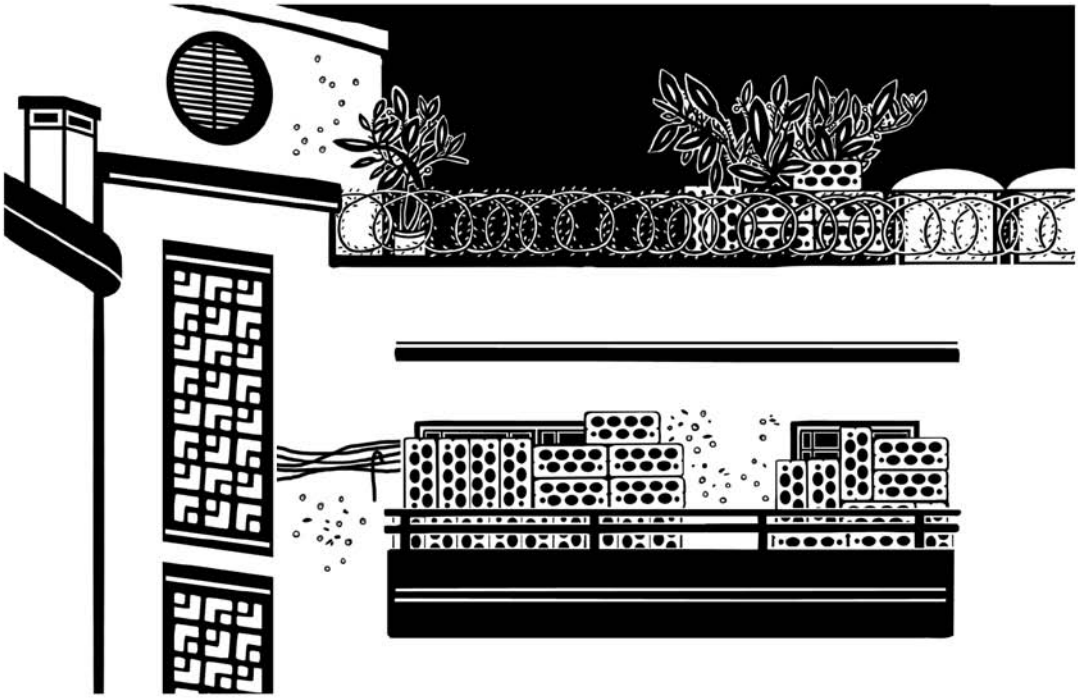
—Trina Robbins
March 2012


LEBANON AND SURROUNDING AREA 1975–1990
HOMS
TRIPOLI
LEBANON
SYRIA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
N
BEIRUT
AREA OF INSET
SIDON
DAMASCUS
TYRE
INTERNATIONAL BORDER
DISPUTED BORDER
CITY BORDER (INSET)
CAPITAL
CITY
MILES
0 10 20 30
0 20 40
KILOMETERS
TEL AVIV
ISRAEL
BEIRUT, LEBANON
WEST BEIRUT (MUSLIM)
EAST BEIRUT (CHRISTIAN)
DEMARCATION LINE ("GREEN LINE")
0 .5 1 1.5 MILES
0 1 2 KILOMETERS
JERUSALEM

EAST BEIRUT — 1984







RUE 60 | ٦٠ شارع
شارع يوسف سماني
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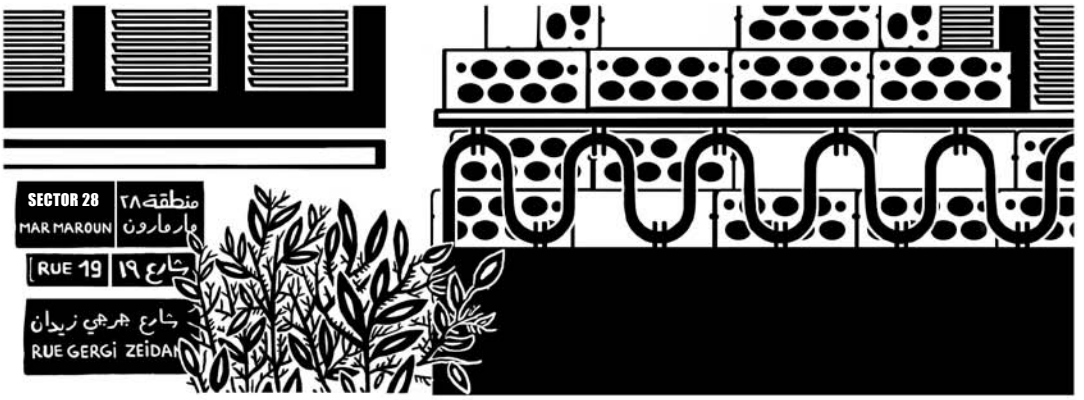
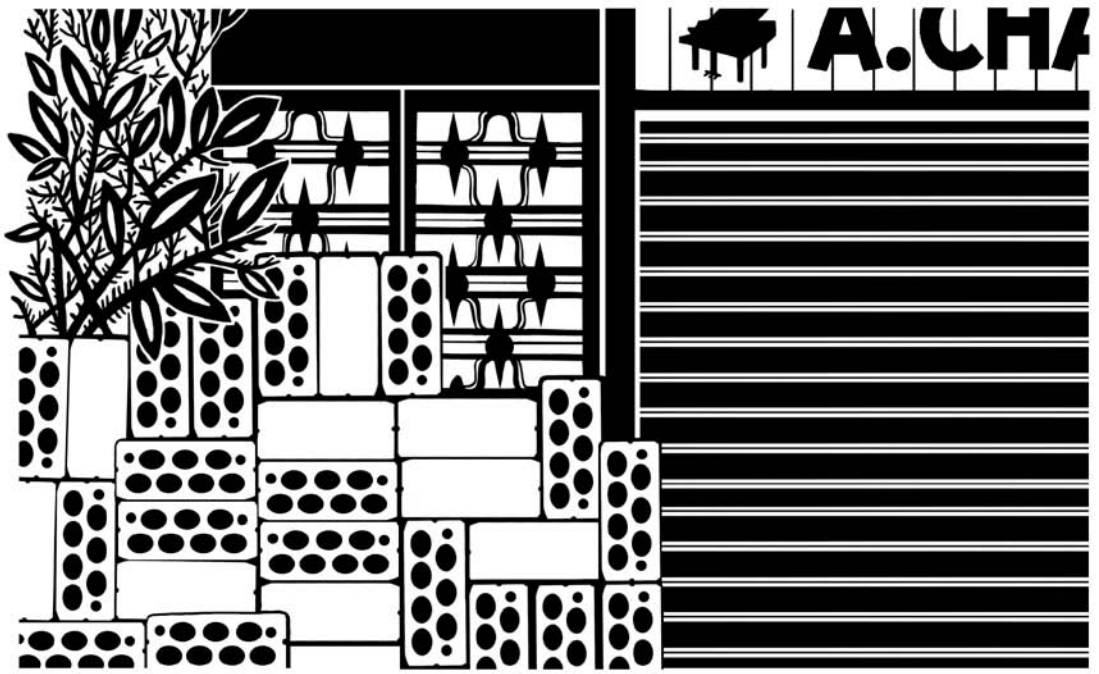
GARAGE

SECTOR 10

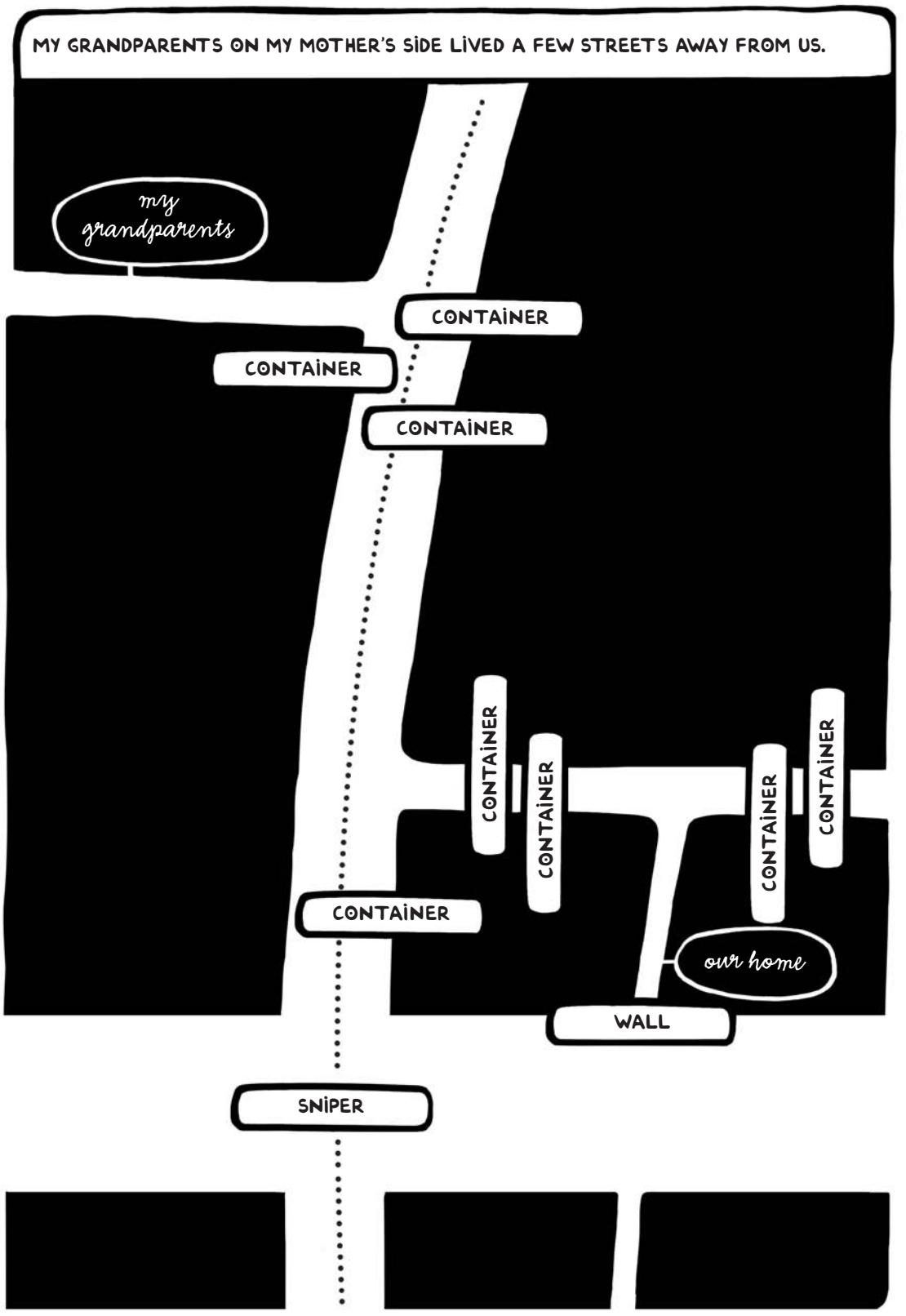
S10
SECTOR 10
WIDO
حليب



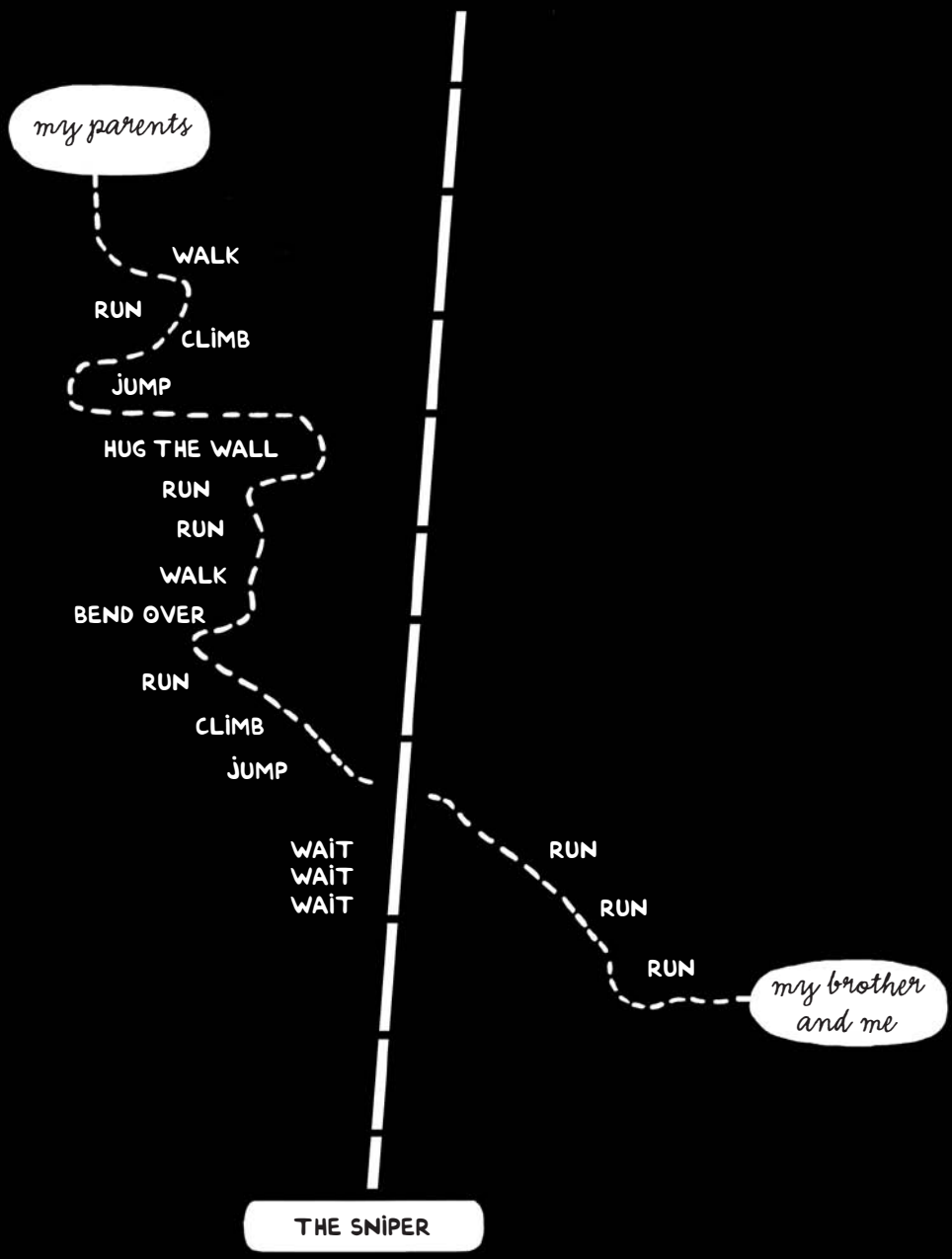
IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS ALONG THE DEMARCATION LINE, WALLS OF SANDBAGS SEVER THE STREETS.
CONTAINERS TAKEN FROM THE DOCKS OF THE DESERTED PORT STAND IN THE MIDDLE OF ALLEYS TO PROTECT RESIDENTS FROM SNIPERS' BULLETS.
BUILDINGS SHUT THEMSELVES AWAY BEHIND WALLS OF CINDER BLOCKS AND METAL DRUMS.
INSIDE THESE DIVIDED SECTORS, LIFE IS ORGANIZED AROUND THE CEASE-FIRES.



THAT DAY, MY PARENTS HAD GONE TO VISIT GRANDMOTHER ANNIE. VIOLENT BOMBARDMENT HAD KEPT THEM FROM COMING HOME.
NOUR, SWEETIE, DON'T WORRY.
YOUR CHILDREN WON'T BE ALONE LONG.
COME SIT OVER HERE, BY ME.
COME CLOSER. I CAN'T SEE A THING WITH THIS CAMP STOVE.


MY GRANDPARENTS ON MY MOTHER'S SIDE LIVED A FEW STREETS AWAY FROM US.
my grandparents
CONTAINER
CONTAINER
CONTAINER
CONTAINER
CONTAINER
CONTAINER
CONTAINER
CONTAINER
our home
WALL
SNIPER

TO AVOID THE SNIPER, PEOPLE HAD PERFECTED A WAY OF MOVING BETWEEN BUILDINGS.



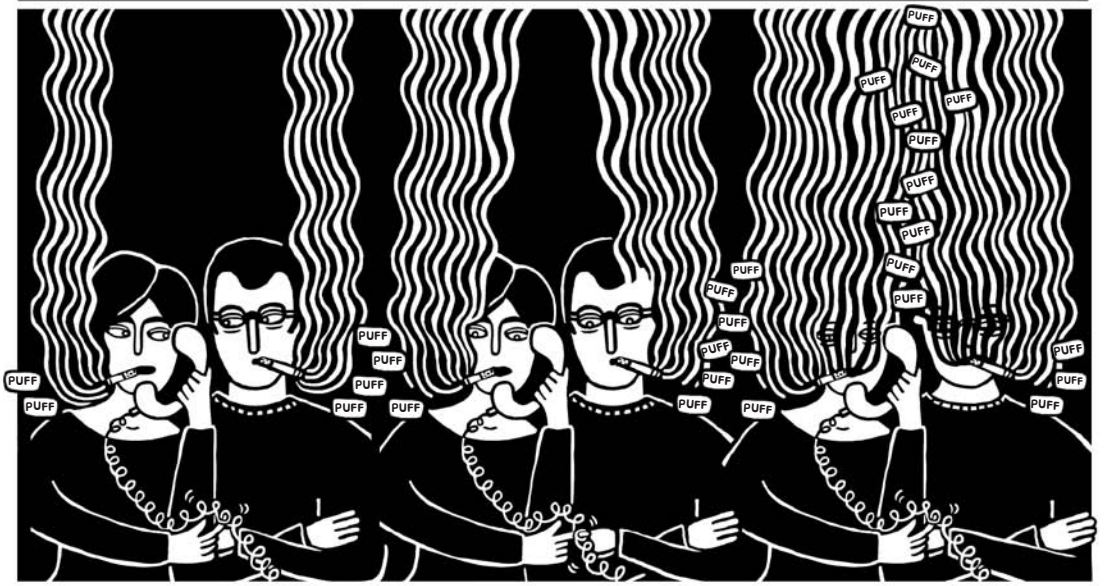
CROSSING THE HANDFUL OF STREETS BETWEEN US MEANT FOLLOWING COMPLICATED AND PERILOUS CHOREOGRAPHY.

REMIND ME TO TELL YOUR FATHER TO BUY A NEW ONE.
TSK TSK!
THIS ONE'S WORTHLESS!
WHEN I THINK HOW YOUR FATHER AND I USED TO USE IT WHEN WE WENT CAMPING...
WE TRAVELED ALL OVER THE COUNTRY! NORTH TO SOUTH!
HASROUN, THE CEDARS, LAKLOUK, BOLOGNA, ALEY, SOUK EL-GHARB, NABEH EL-SAFA, KFARNIS, THE BEQAA, JEZZINE, BKASSINE... YOU NAME IT!
Sigh
THERE'S NOWHERE WE DIDN'T GO WITH THIS CAMP STOVE!

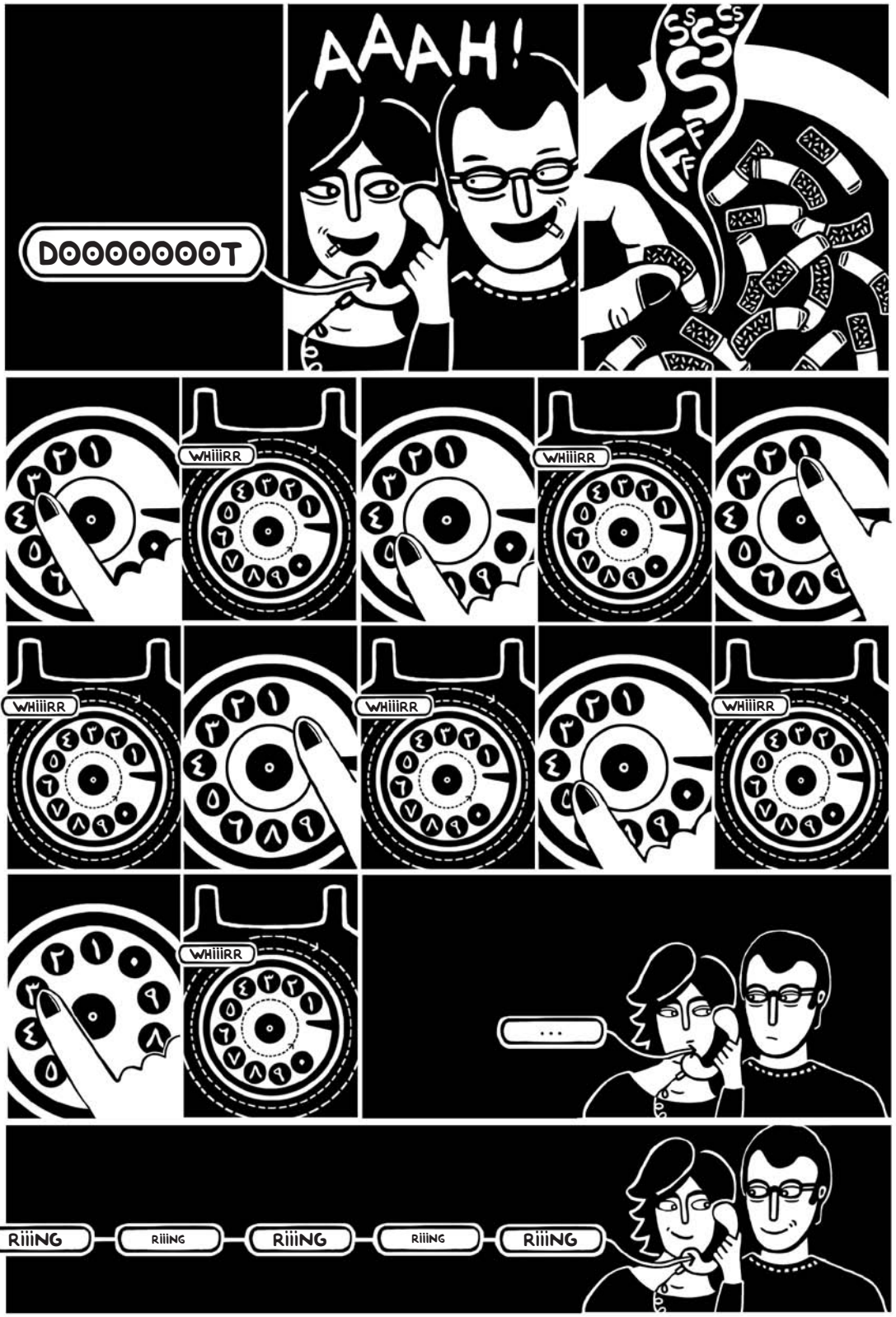
AHHHH!
THOSE WERE GOOD TIMES!
NOUR! SAMI! DON'T LOOK SO WORRIED. COME OVER HERE.
TRY REACHING THEM ON THE PHONE.

BACK THEN, IT WAS VERY HARD TO REACH SOMEONE BY PHONE.

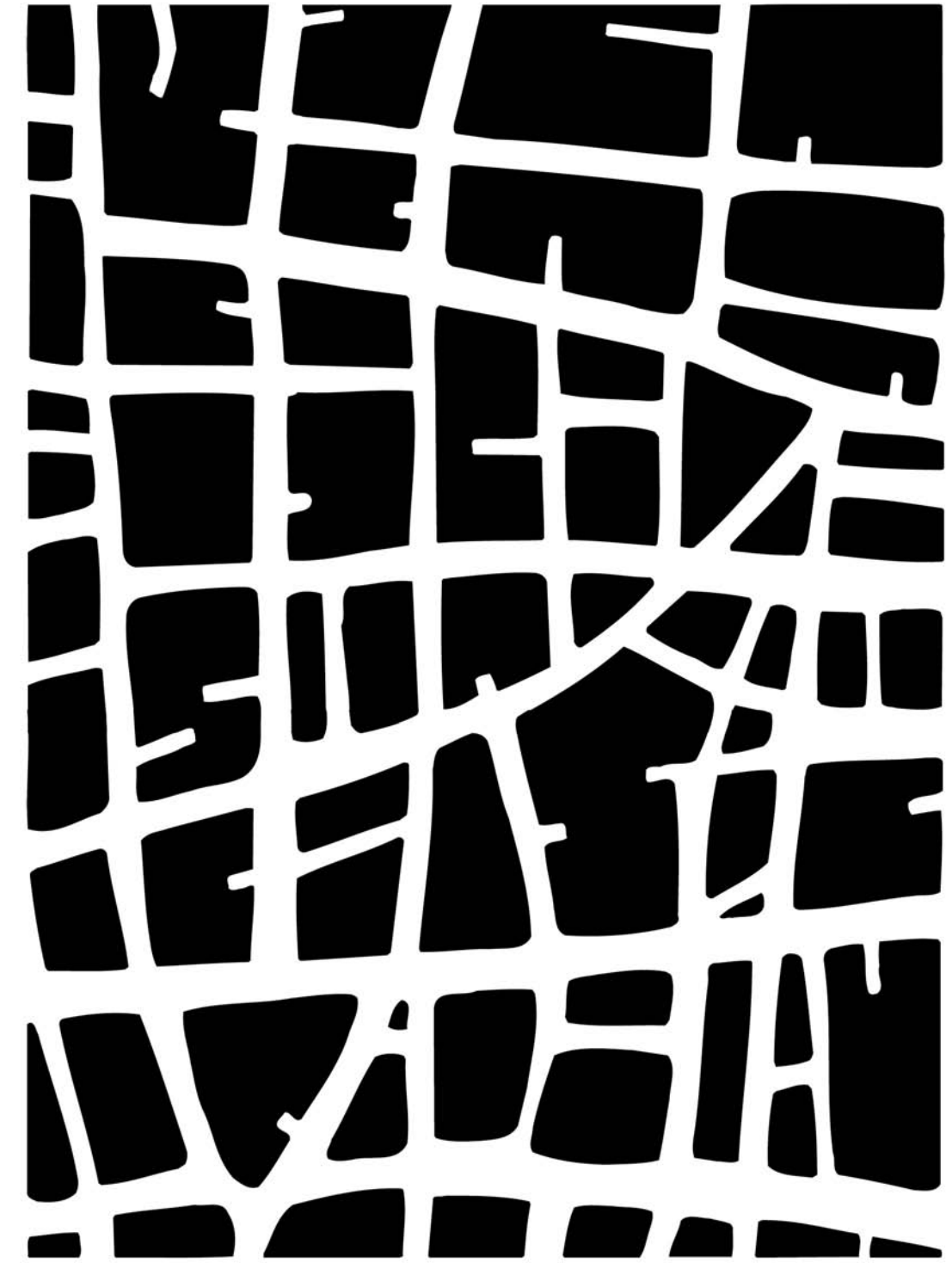
YOU COULD WAIT HOURS ON END JUST FOR A DIAL TONE.



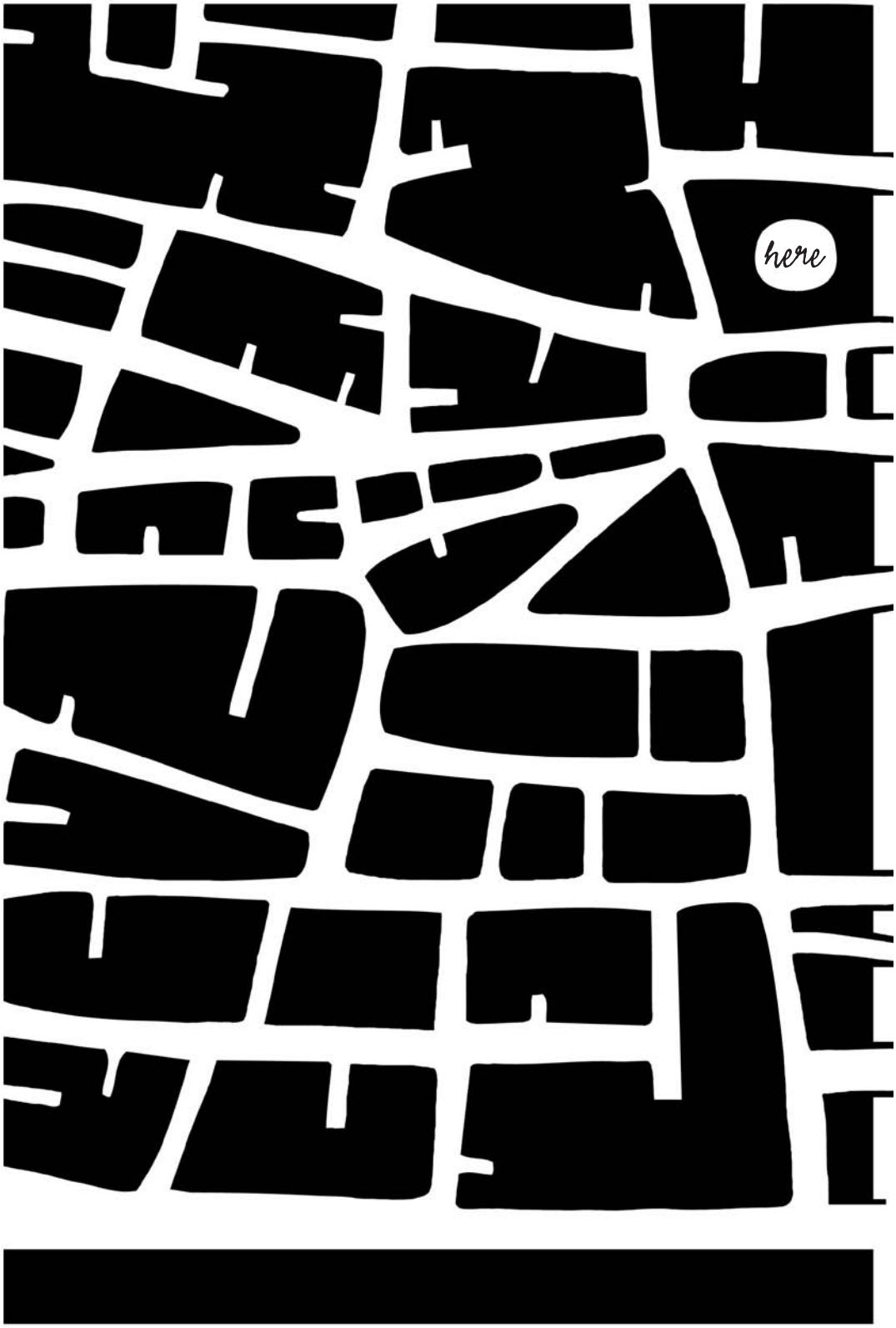
SOMETIMES, WHEN MY MOTHER HAD AN IMPORTANT PHONE CALL TO MAKE, SHE'D ASK ME AND MY BROTHER TO WAIT FOR THE "KHATT" (DIAL TONE) SO SHE COULD DO SOMETHING ELSE IN THE MEANTIME.


DOOOOOOOT
AAAH!
SSSSSSSSSS
WHiiiRR
WHiiiRR
WHiiiRR
WHiiiRR
WHiiiRR
WHiiiRR
...
RiiiNG
RiiiNG
RiiiNG
RiiiNG
RiiiNG

DON'T WORRY.
I'M SURE YOU'LL BE ABLE TO GO BACK TO THEM SOON.
ANYWAY...
AT LEAST...
...I THINK MAYBE WE'RE STILL MORE OR LESS SAFE HERE.



HERE IS ALL THE SPACE WE HAVE LEFT ...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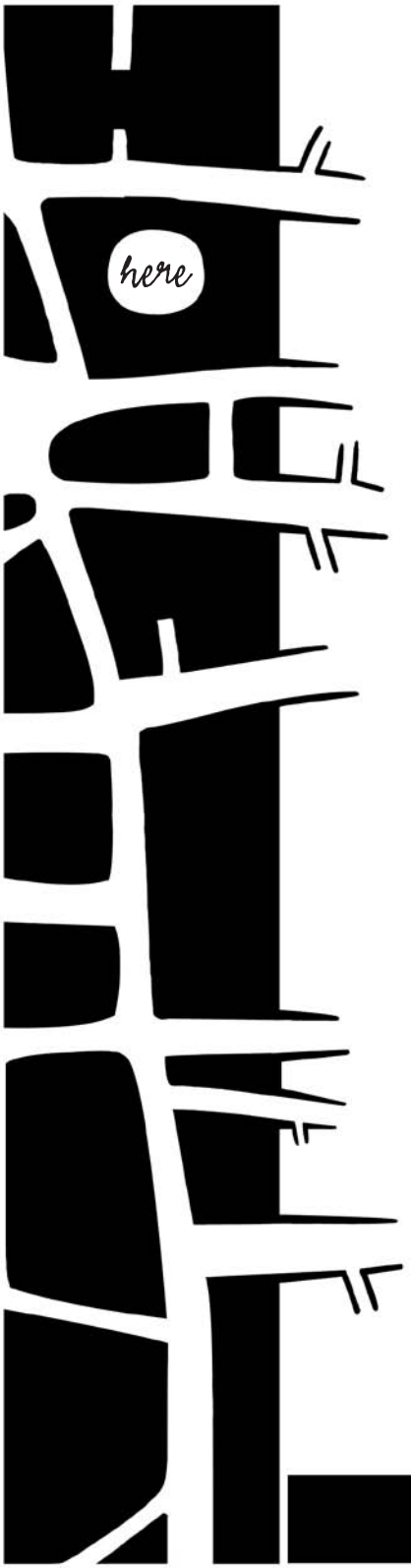
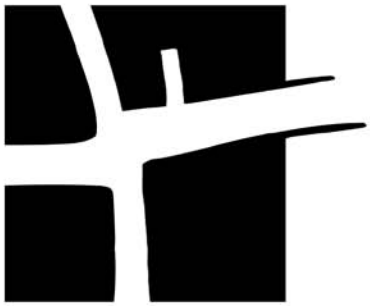


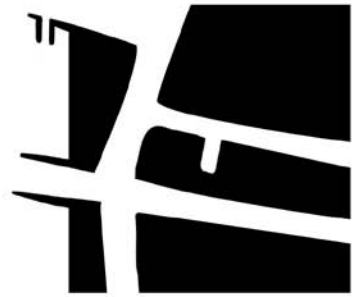
...IN THIS STRANGE HALF CITY.

SNIPERS,



OIL DRUMS,

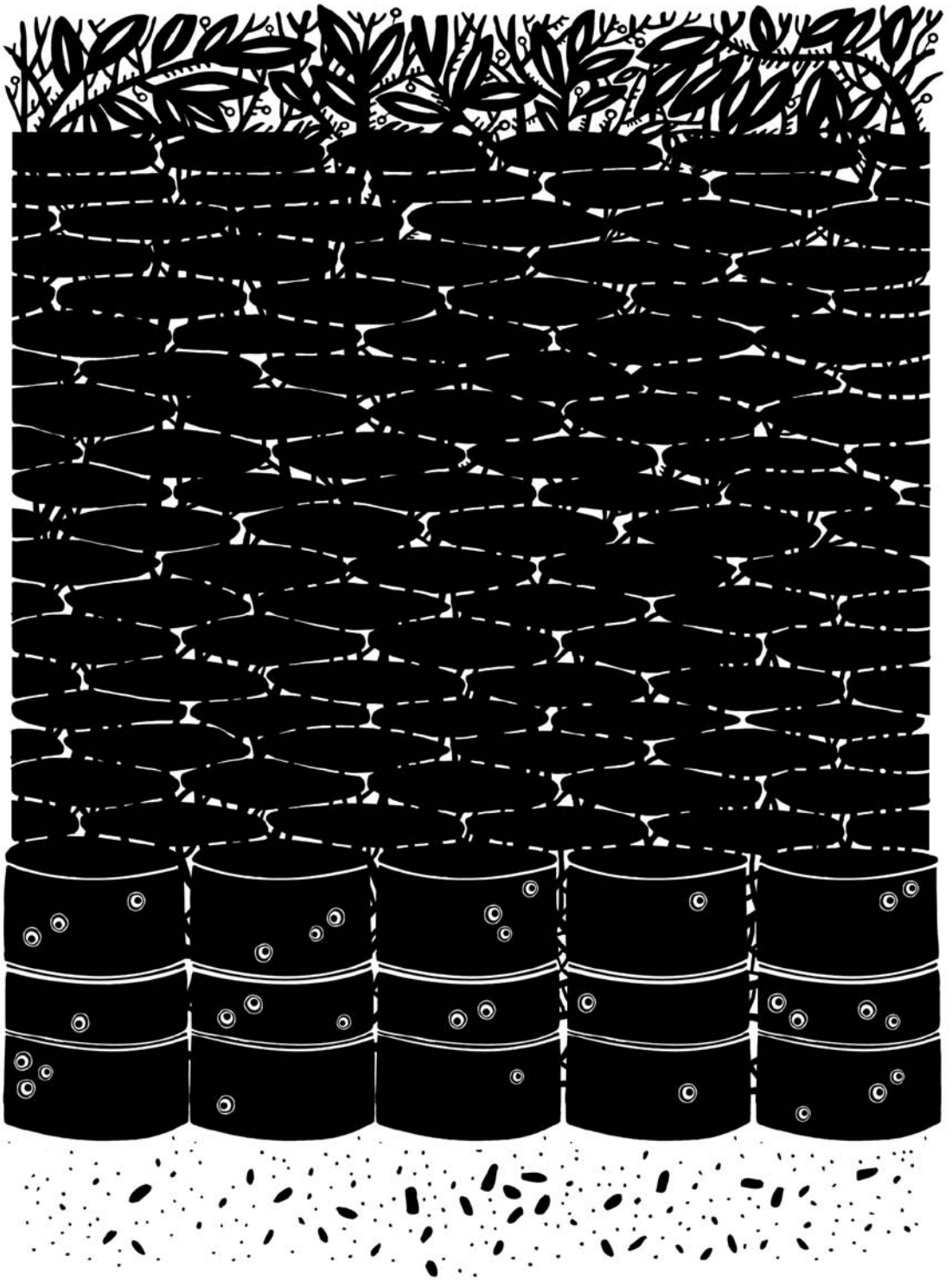
CONTAINERS,



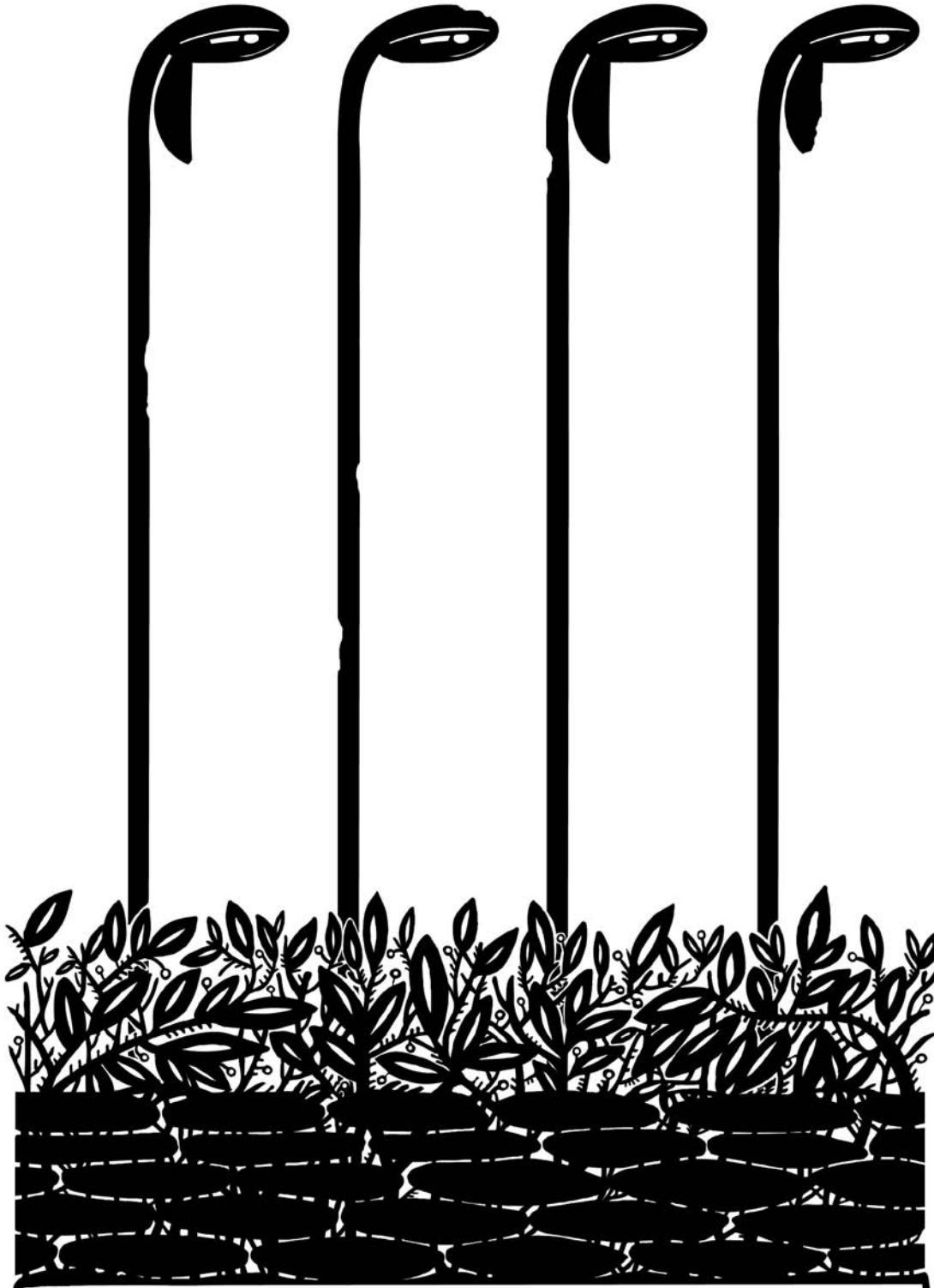
BARBED WIRE,

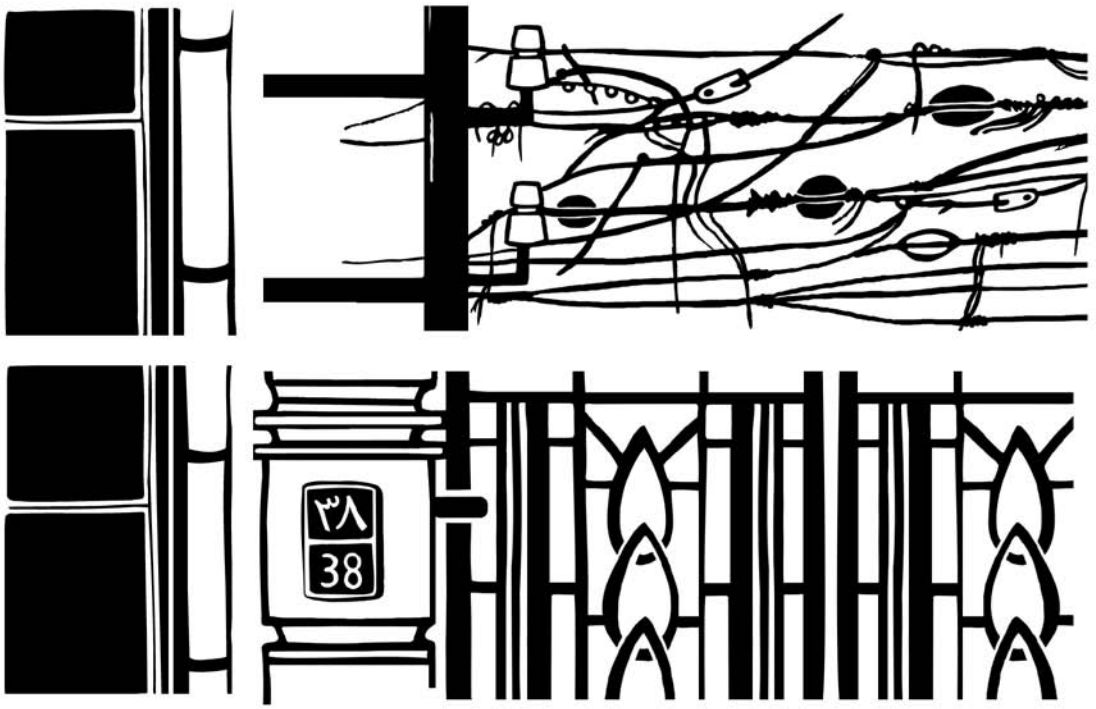
SANDBAGS

CARVE OUT A NEW GEOGRAPHY.

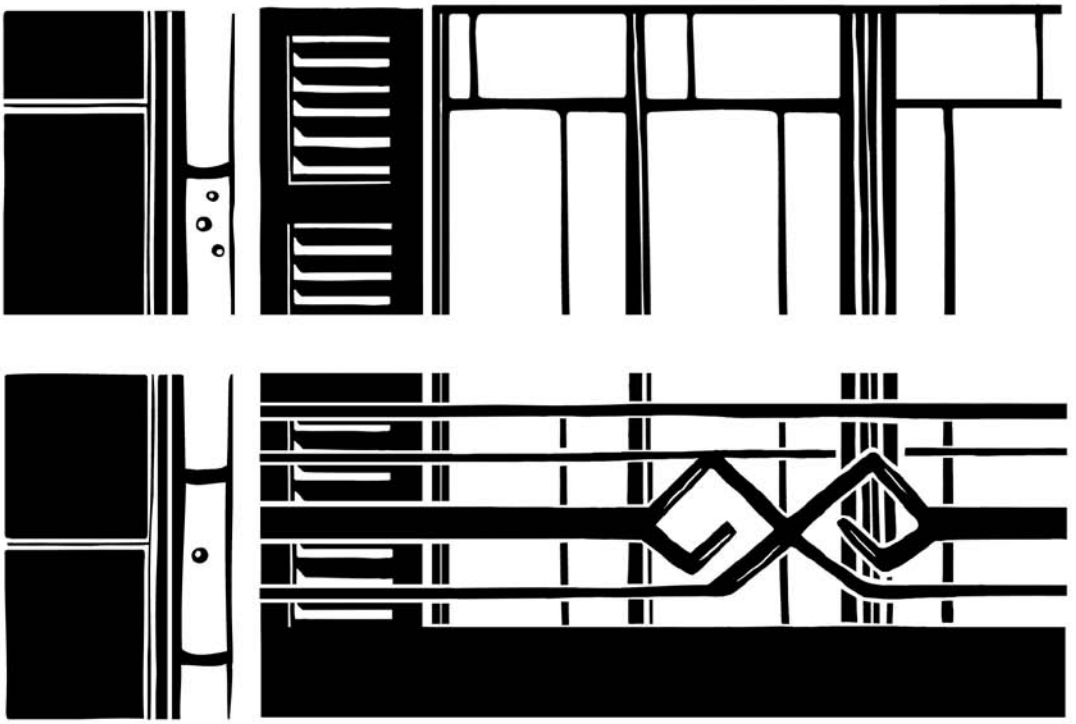


OUR APARTMENT BUILDING LOOKED OUT ON THE DEMARCATION LINE.

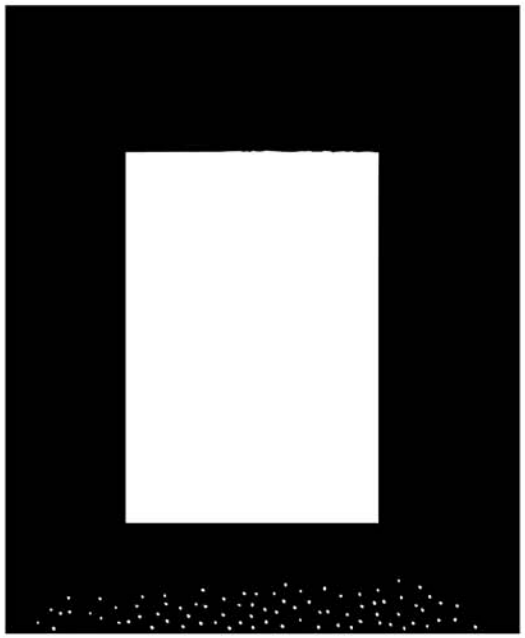

ACROSS THE WAY, IMPASSIVE STREETLIGHTS STUCK OUT THEIR TONGUES AT THE EMPTINESS.

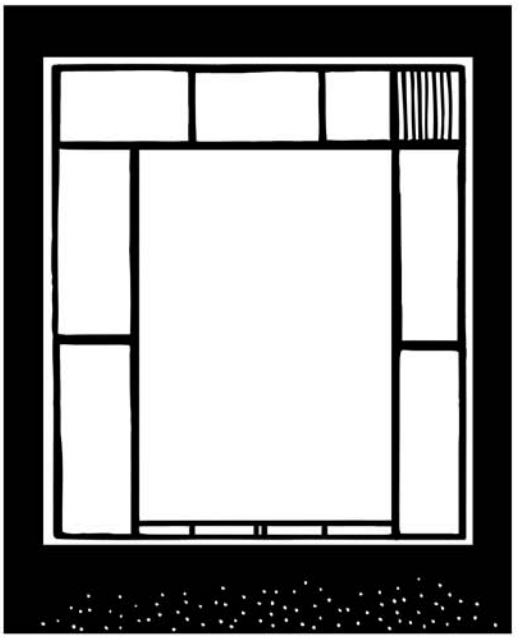


IT WAS A BUILDING FROM THE 1940S. MY FATHER'S PARENTS HAD LIVED THERE ALL THEIR LIVES.

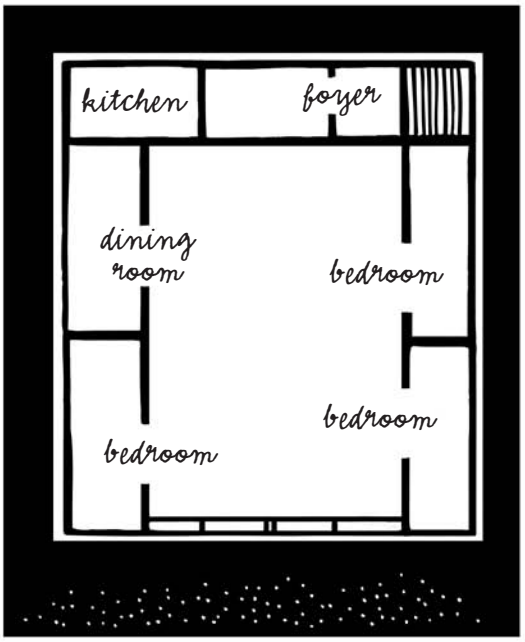


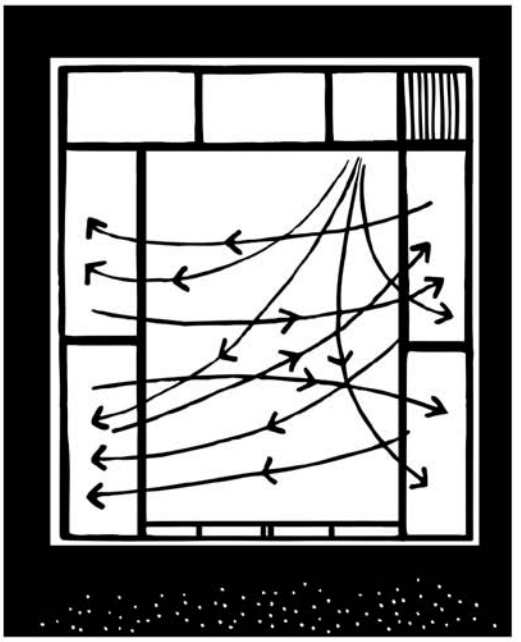
I GREW UP IN THE SECOND-FLOOR APARTMENT WHERE MY FATHER WAS BORN.

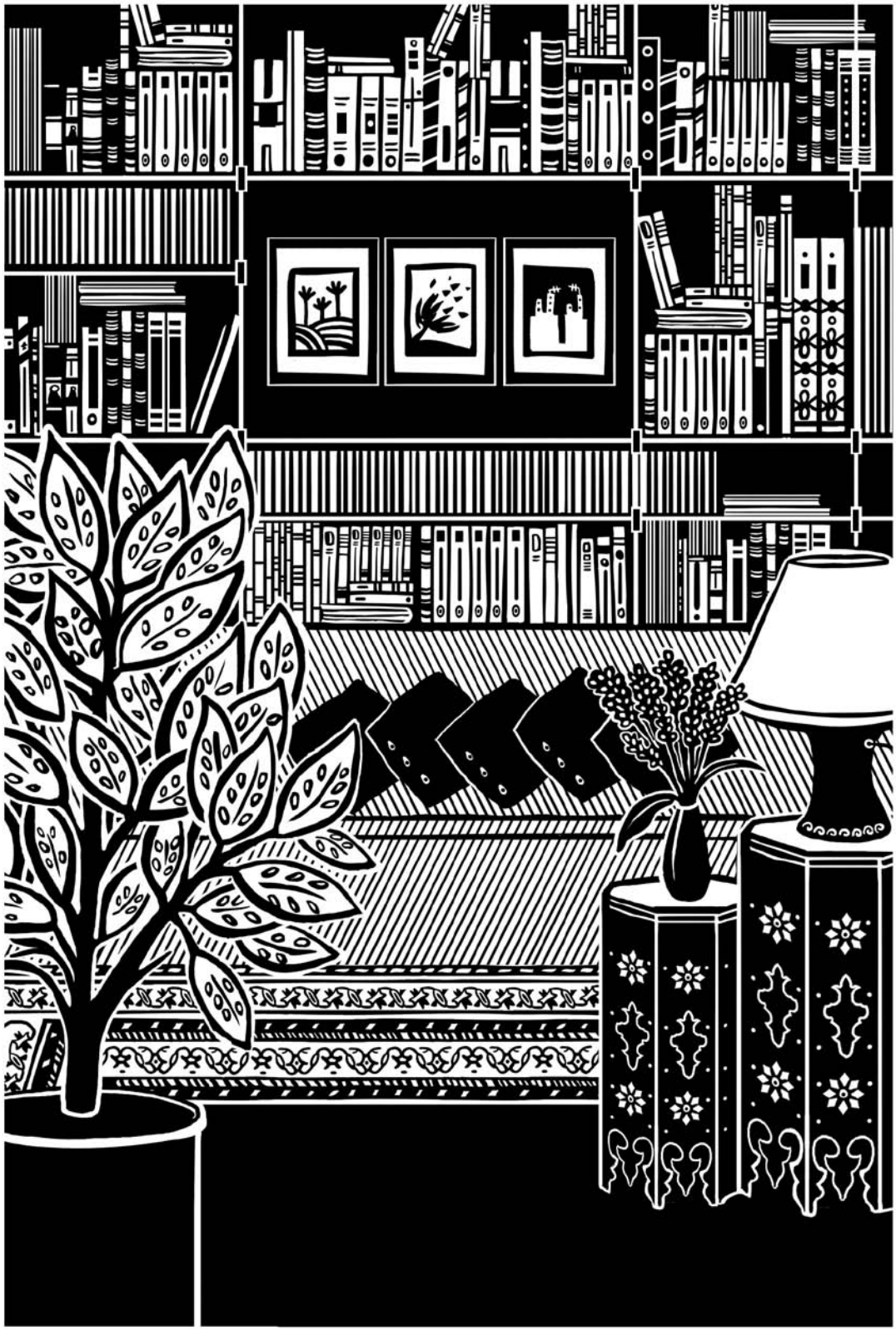




LAID OUT IN THE STYLE OF THE TIME, THE APARTMENT WAS ORGANIZED AROUND THE LIVING ROOM, A LARGE RECTANGLE THAT LINKED THE TWO MAIN PARTS OF OUR HOME.



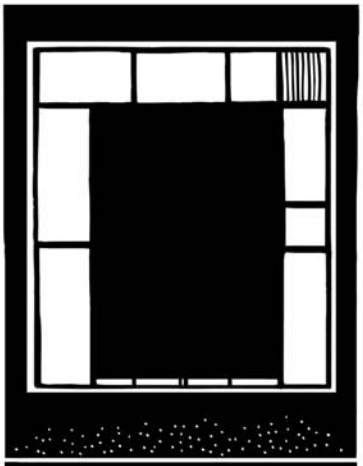




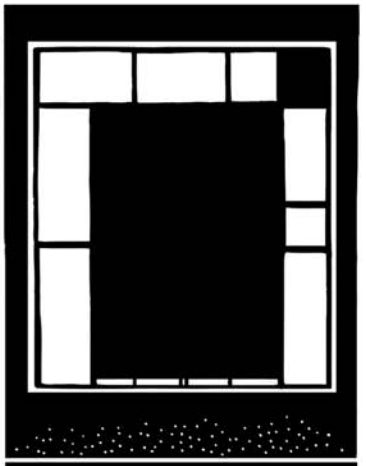
WITH THE STREET BARRICADE JUST UNDER THE WINDOWS, THE LIVING ROOM WAS SOON DESERTED.

BIT BY BIT, THE BEDROOMS, KITCHEN, AND DINING ROOM WERE SEALED OFF...

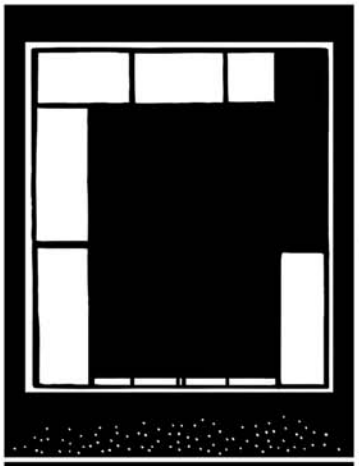
AND OUR HOME



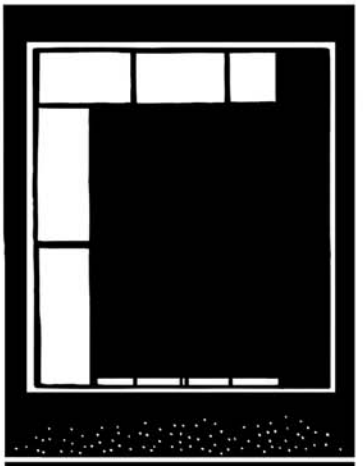
BEGAN



TO SHRINK



AND SHRINK



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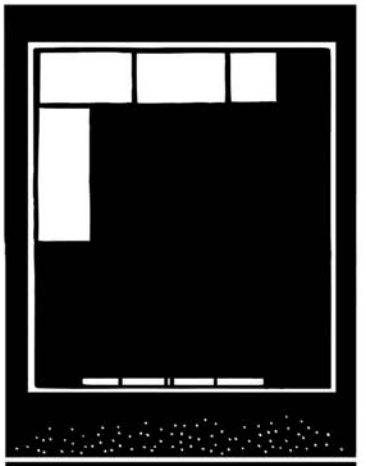

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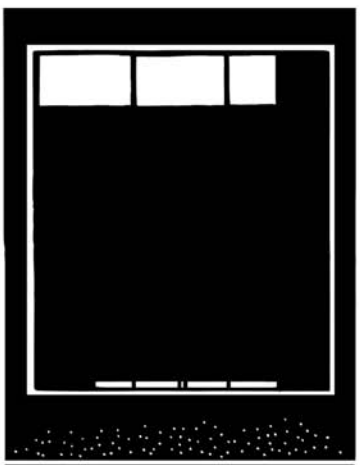
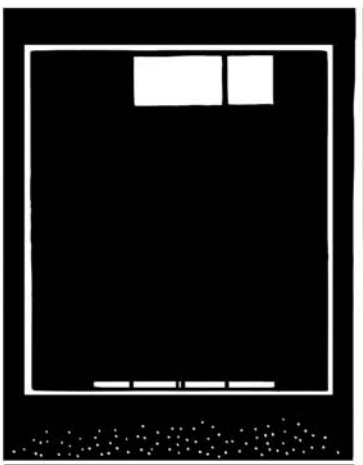
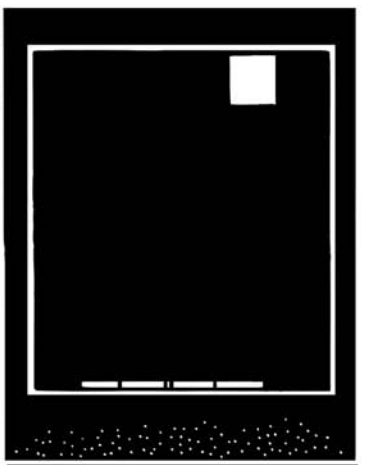


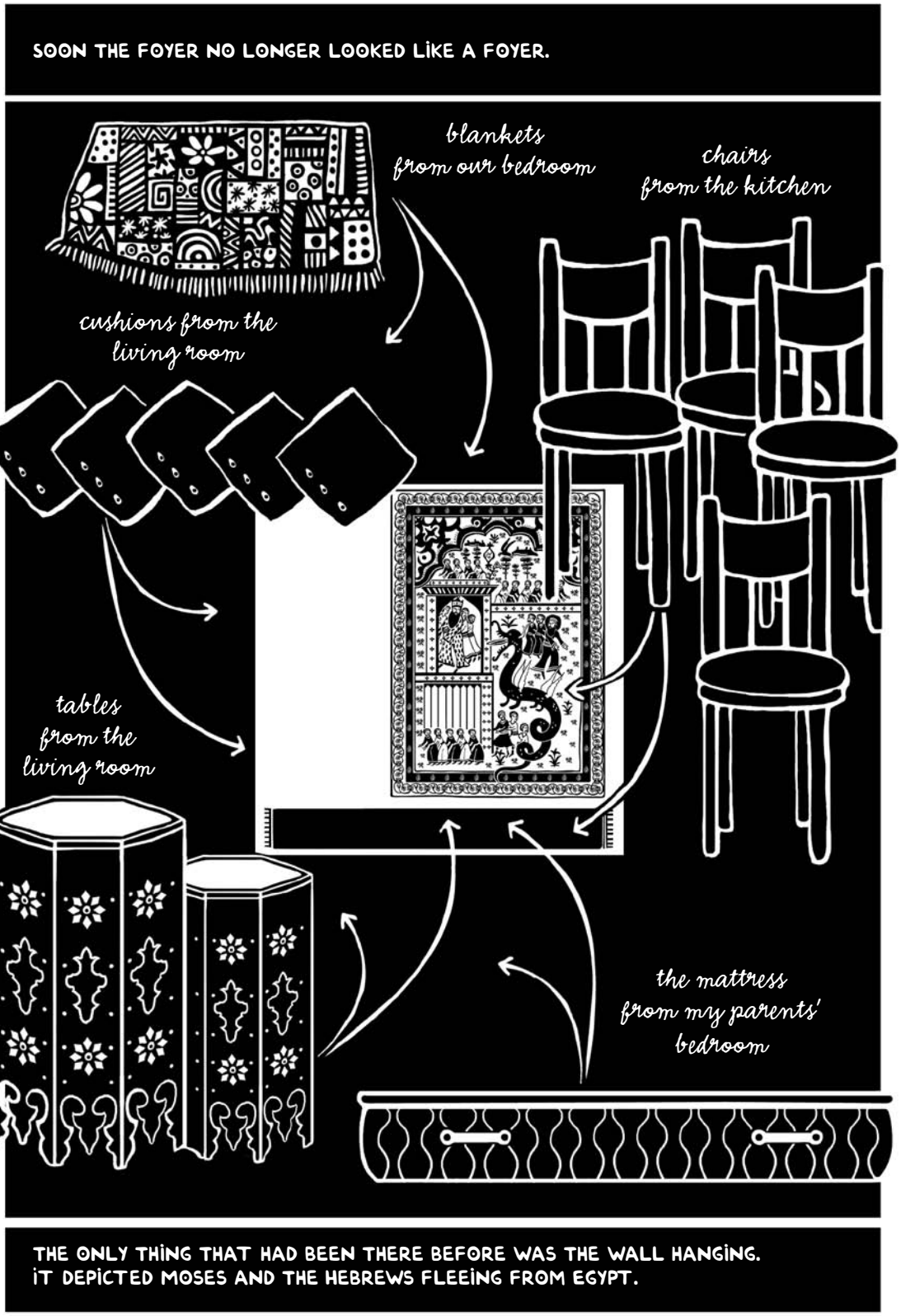
UNTIL IT WAS JUST

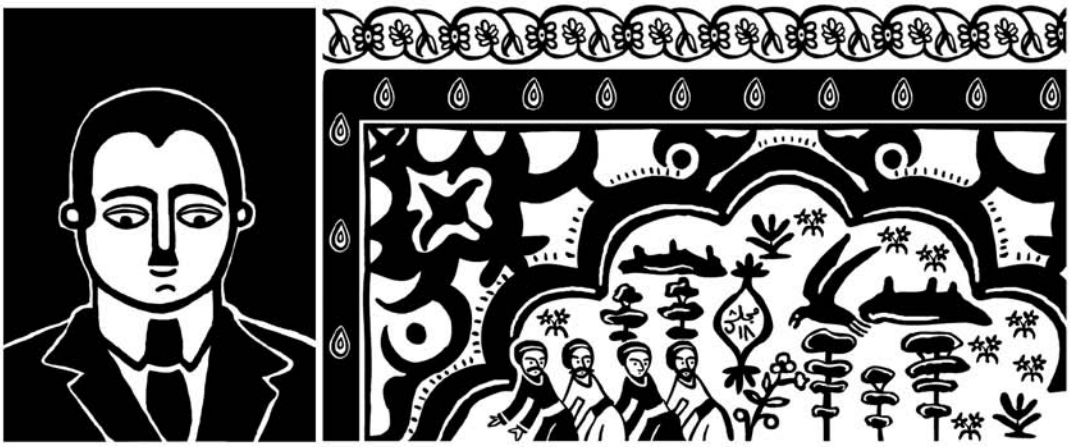


A TINY LITTLE SQUARE:



THE FOYER.


SOON THE FOYER NO LONGER LOOKED LIKE A FOYER.
blankets from our bedroom
chairs from the kitchen
cushions from the living room
tables from the living room
the mattress from my parents' bedroom
THE ONLY THING THAT HAD BEEN THERE BEFORE WAS THE WALL HANGING. IT DEPICTED MOSES AND THE HEBREWS FLEEING FROM EGYPT.

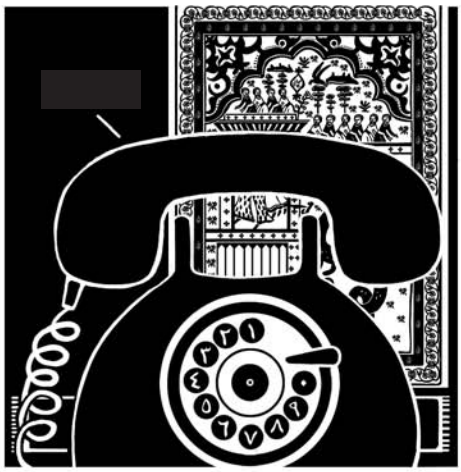


THAT WALL HANGING WAS THE ONLY THING OF MY FATHER'S FATHER LEFT TO US.

AFTER HIS PARENTS DIED, MY FATHER FOUND IT FOLDED UP IN A BOX IN THE ATTIC.

IT WAS ALREADY HANGING IN THE FOYER WHEN I WAS BORN.

I NEVER KNEW MY FATHER'S PARENTS, AND I ALWAYS ASSOCIATED THEM WITH THAT WALL HANGING.
GATHERED TOGETHER IN THE FOYER, WE WERE SAFE.

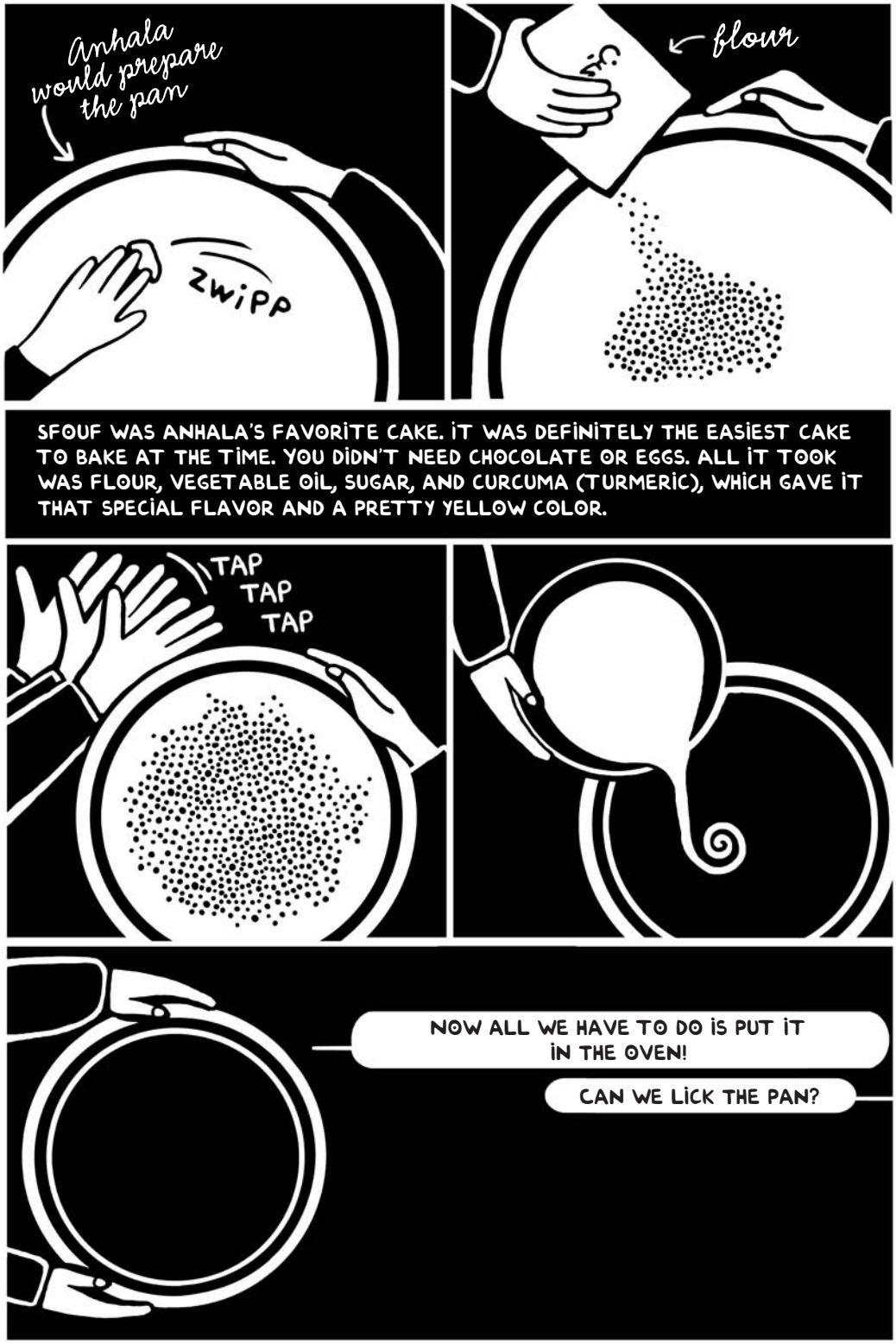


- HELLO?
- ...
- MOMMMM!
- ...
- YES, EVERYTHING'S FINE. WE'RE TOGETHER, AND ANHALA'S WITH US.
- ...
- NO. NO, I'M NOT AFRAID.
- ...
- ...OF COURSE I'LL WATCH OUT FOR HIM.
- ...
- DO YOU WANT TO TALK TO ANHALA?
- ...
- MOM?
- ...
- WHEN ARE YOU AND POP COMING BACK?

YES, I WENT DOWN EARLIER TO CHECK ON YOU. WHEN I DIDN'T SEE YOU, I STAYED WITH THE CHILDREN.
NO, HONEY, DON'T WORRY. THEY'RE HERE WITH ME. WE'RE IN THE FOYER.

SINCE WE LIVED ON THE SECOND FLOOR, THE FLOOR LEAST EXPOSED TO SHELLING, OUR APARTMENT'S FOYER WAS THE SAFEST ROOM IN THE WHOLE BUILDING... AND OUR NEIGHBORS HAD GOTTEN INTO THE HABIT OF GATHERING THERE EVENINGS WHEN THERE WAS BOMBING.

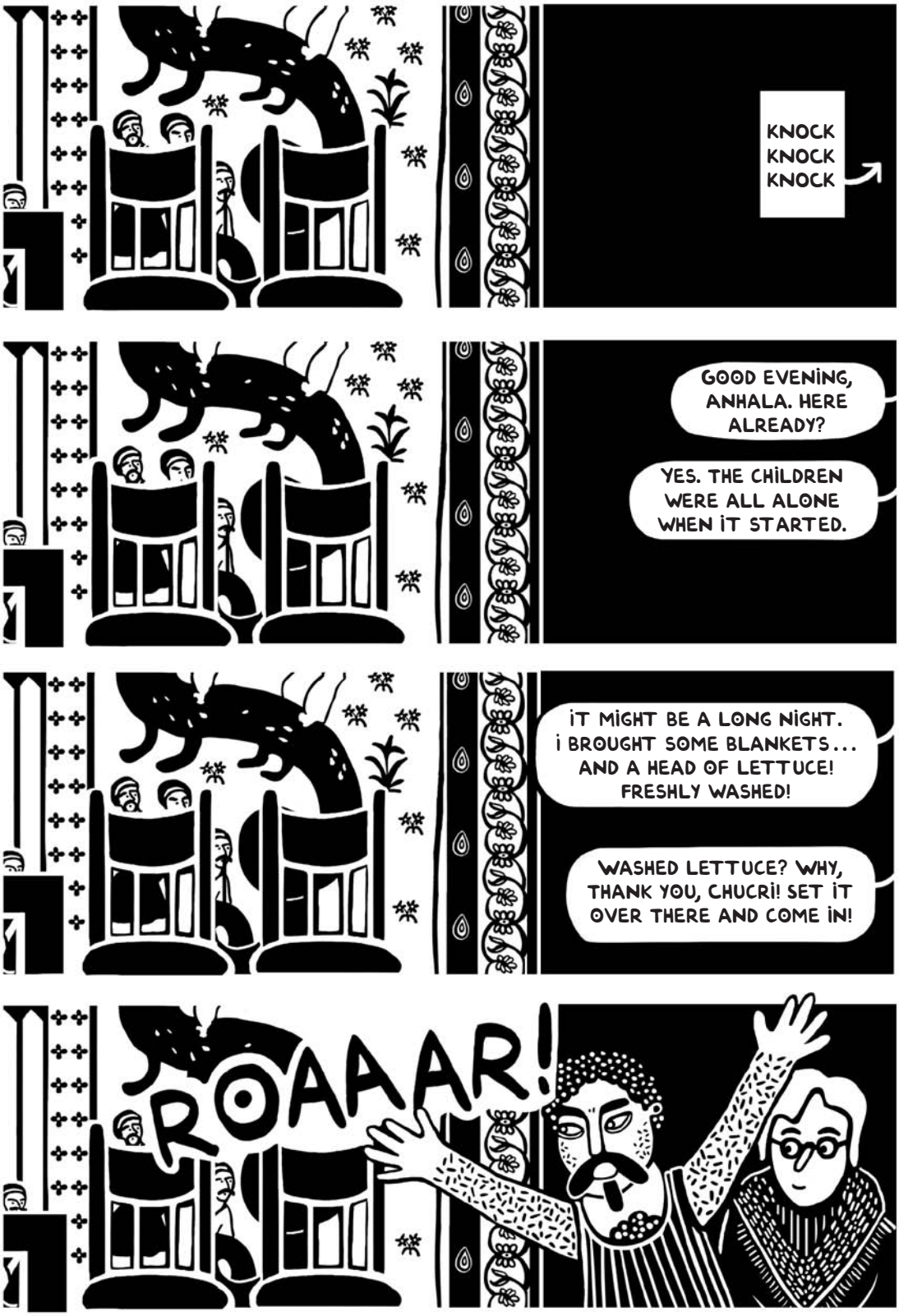
WANT TO HELP ME MAKE A SFOUF?
Yeee eaah!
GIMME!
سكّر
طحين
طحين

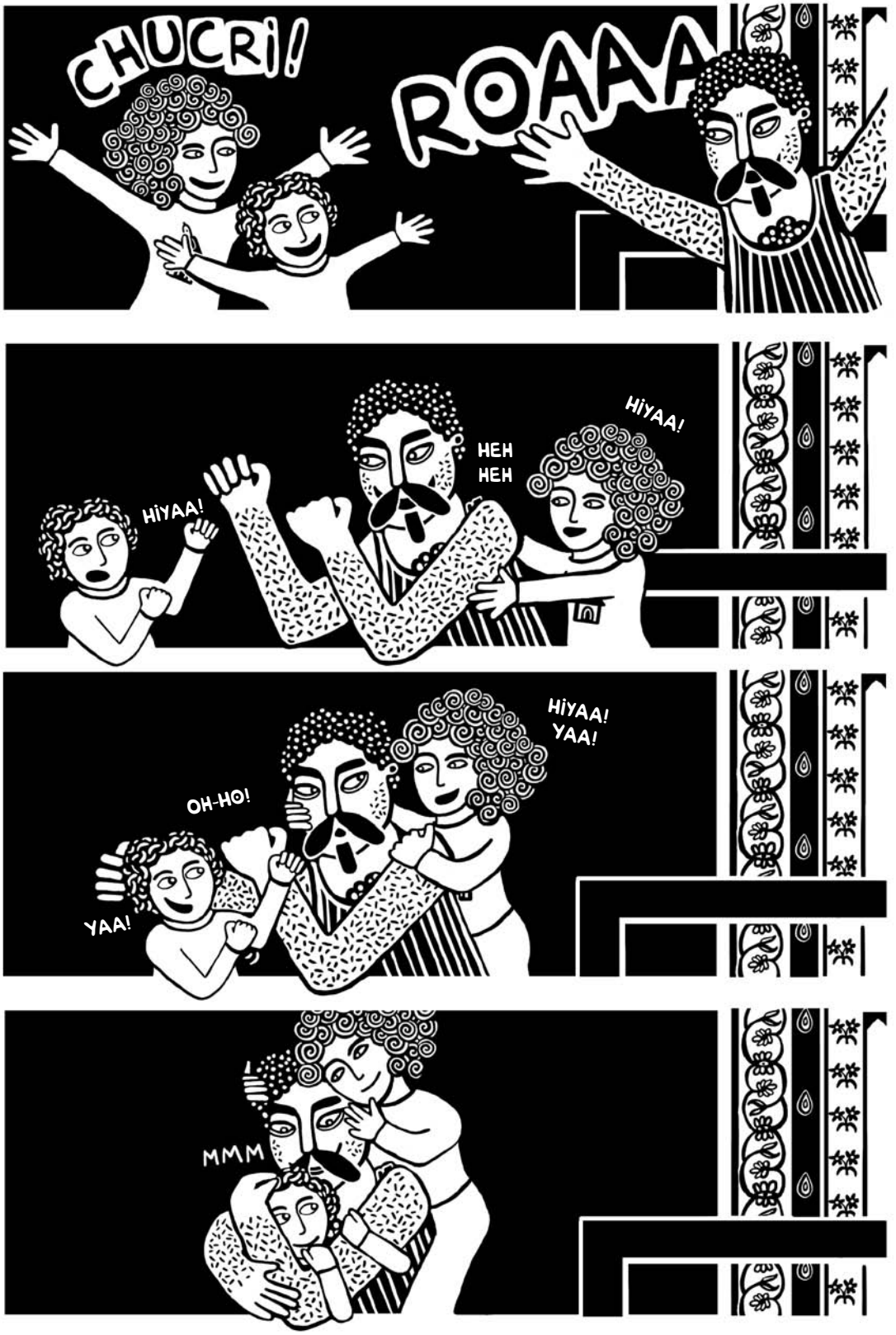

Anhala would prepare the pan
zwipp
flour
SFOUF WAS ANHALA'S FAVORITE CAKE. IT WAS DEFINITELY THE EASIEST CAKE TO BAKE AT THE TIME. YOU DIDN'T NEED CHOCOLATE OR EGGS. ALL IT TOOK WAS FLOUR, VEGETABLE OIL, SUGAR, AND CURCUMA (TURMERIC), WHICH GAVE IT THAT SPECIAL FLAVOR AND A PRETTY YELLOW COLOR.
TAP
TAP
TAP
NOW ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS PUT IT IN THE OVEN!
CAN WE LICK THE PAN?

AND OFF SHE WENT TO THE KITCHEN TO PUT THE SFOUF IN THE OVEN...

What time is it?
...
Quarter past four!
Who told you so?
Mister Moore!
Where'd he go?
To the store!
Whatever for?
To buy cigars!
Who wants cigars?
His wife wants cigars...

And who was his wife?
His wife? You are!
HEE HEE HEE
HEY
His wife? You are!
HM
His wife? You are!


KNOCK
KNOCK
KNOCK
GOOD EVENING, ANHALA. HERE ALREADY?
YES. THE CHILDREN WERE ALL ALONE WHEN IT STARTED.
IT MIGHT BE A LONG NIGHT. I BROUGHT SOME BLANKETS... AND A HEAD OF LETTUCE! FRESHLY WASHED!
WASHED LETTUCE? WHY, THANK YOU, CHUCRI! SET IT OVER THERE AND COME IN!
ROAAAR!


CHUCRI!
ROAAA
HIYAA!
HEH
HEH
HIYAA!
HIYAA!
YAA!
OH-HO!
YAA!
MMM

CHUCRI WAS THE SON OF SALMA, THE BUILDING CARETAKER.

HE WAS 16 WHEN WAR BROKE OUT IN 1975.

A YEAR LATER, HIS FATHER, SAÏD, A TAXI DRIVER, DISAPPEARED.

HE HAD JUST DROPPED A CUSTOMER OFF AT THE CENTRAL BANK, WEST OF THE CITY, AND WAS HEADING HOME.
HE PHONED HIS WIFE TO REASSURE HER BEFORE HITTING THE ROAD. CHUCRI ANSWERED.
"TELL YOUR MOTHER I'M COMING," HIS FATHER SAID.

THE NEXT DAY, SAÏD'S CAR WAS FOUND ABANDONED ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, WITHOUT SEATS OR TIRES, ON ONE OF THE ROADS ALLOWING PASSAGE BETWEEN THE EASTERN AND WESTERN PARTS OF THE CITY.
NO ONE EVER FOUND OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO SAÏD.

FROM A YOUNG AGE, CHUCRI HAD TO SCRAMBLE TO SUPPORT HIS MOTHER AND PROVIDE FOR HIS THREE YOUNGER SISTERS.
PARDON ME. ALMOST NODDED OFF THERE.
HM
THE YOUNGEST, JEANETTE, WAS VERY GOOD WITH HER HANDS. TO HELP HIM OUT, SHE DID LITTLE BITS OF SEWING FOR PEOPLE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.
SHLLRRP
I PARKED THE CAR IN FRONT OF THE ABU JAMIL GAS STATION AT FIVE THIS MORNING. I FIGURED MAYBE IT WAS THE ONLY WAY TO BE FIRST IN LINE.
SO, WERE YOU?
CHUCRI STARTED OUT RUNNING LITTLE ERRANDS FOR PEOPLE IN THE BUILDING: CLEARING AWAY BROKEN TILE, PASTING CLEAR PLASTIC SHEETING ON THE WINDOWS, PLUGGING UP SHRAPNEL HOLES IN THE WALLS...
SHLLRRP

THEN, AS BLACKOUTS BECAME MORE COMMON, HE STARTED DOING BITS OF ELECTRICAL REPAIR.

AND AS WAR WAS INCREASINGLY BECOMING PART OF OUR DAILY LIFE, CHUCRI SANK WHAT LITTLE HE'D MANAGED TO SET ASIDE INTO THE THING THAT WOULD REGULATE OUR DAYS AND NIGHTS FOR YEARS: AN ELECTRIC GENERATOR.

NEXT, CHUCRI PROPOSED A MONTHLY FEE TO THE ENTIRE BUILDING. THAT WAY, EVERYONE COULD BENEFIT FROM THE "MOTOR" HE'D SET UP ON HIS BALCONY.

AFTER CAREFULLY CALCULATING THE AMPS INVOLVED, YOU COULD, WITH THE "MOTOR," LIGHT UP PART OF YOUR HOME, OR ONE ROOM AND THE TV, OR DO SOME VACUUMING OR IRONING.

SEVERAL YEARS?!
SHLLRRP
NOOOO, ANHALA. IT'LL BE OVER IN A YEAR AT MOST. WE'LL PUT IT BEHIND US AND GO BACK TO LIVING LIKE BEFORE.
hm
I'M NOT SAYING IT'LL BE EASY. IT'LL TAKE A FEW YEARS TO REBUILD EVERYTHING, GET THE ECONOMY GOING AGAIN... TO FORGET.
UNTIL THEN, THE IMPORTANT PART IS JUST TO KEEP ON LIVING.

SHLLRRP
BUT IT WON'T BE LONG NOW, THAT'S FOR SURE!
OTHERWISE, DO YOU THINK I'D HAVE GONE TO ALL THIS TROUBLE? NOT AT ALL! I'D HAVE LEFT THE COUNTRY TOO!
SPEAKING OF WHICH, HOW ARE THOSE VISAS?
RAMZI SENT THE APPLICATIONS TO THE CANADIAN EMBASSY IN CYPRUS.
SHLLRRP
MADAME LINDA GAVE THE ENVELOPE TO ZIAD, A RED CROSS AMBULANCE DRIVER SHE KNOWS. HE'S MADAME HYAM'S SON. YOU KNOW, THE WOMAN WHO RAN THE STATIONERY SHOP BY SAINT JOSEPH UNIVERSITY.

ZIAD ENTRUSTED THE ENVELOPE TO A PILOT WHO FLIES MEDICAL SHIPMENTS FOR THE RED CROSS.
SINCE THE PLANE HAD A LAYOVER IN CYPRUS ON THE WAY BACK, HE ASKED THE PILOT TO MAIL THE ENVELOPE AT LARNACA AIRPORT.
hm
IT WAS THE BEST WAY FOR THE PAPERS TO GET THERE SAFELY!
SHLLRRP
hm
SHLLRRP

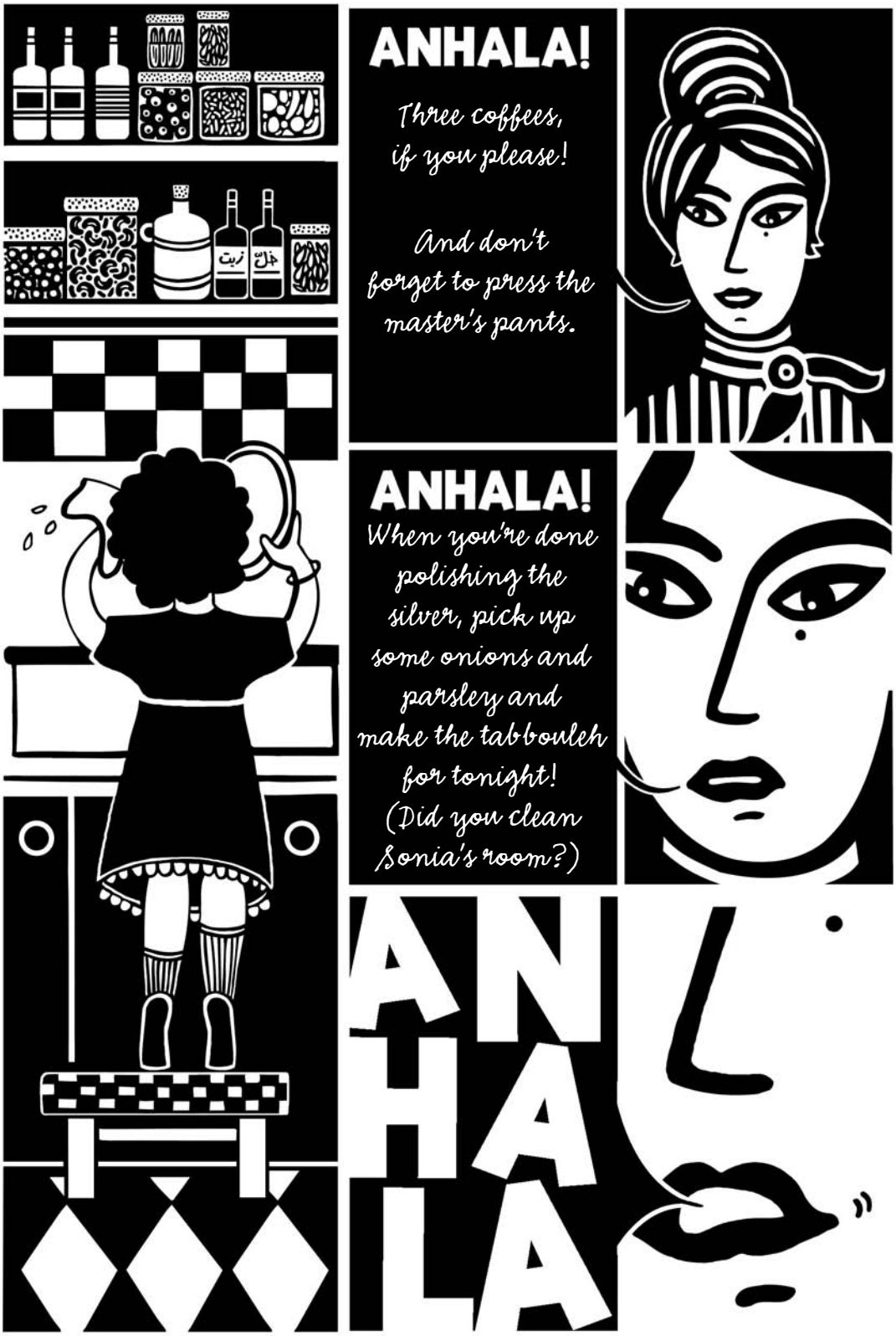
WHAT HAPPENS NOW?
SHLLRRP
hm
NOW THEY WAIT TO BE SUMMONED TO CYPRUS.
SHLLRRP
WHAT ABOUT YOU? YOU'RE NOT GOING WITH THEM?
SHLLRRP

ME? OH, NOOOO.
CANADA'S TOO FAR AWAY...
hm
BESIDES, WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE I WOULD DO WITH MYSELF THERE?
I'M MUCH TOO OLD FOR THAT NOW.
WHEN FARAH WAS LITTLE, HER PARENTS TOOK HER TO PARIS ON VACATION, AND I WENT WITH THEM!
SHLLRRP
AHHH...PARIS WAS SO BEAUTIFUL. YOU HAVE NO IDEA!
PFFF

hm
IT WAS BEAUTIFUL, BUT IT WAS TOO BIG.
IT WAS SO BIG THAT THE PEOPLE YOU PASSED IN THE STREET... WELL, YOU'D PROBABLY NEVER SEE THEM AGAIN!
AND YOU KNOW HOW THEY GET AROUND UP THERE?
HOW?
THEY HAVE TRAINS THAT RUN UNDERGROUND! CAN YOU IMAGINE?!
NOOO,
I'D RATHER STAY RIGHT HERE! AT LEAST I FEEL AT HOME HERE.
ANHALA HAD BEEN WITH FARAH'S FAMILY FOR SIXTY-FIVE YEARS.

SHE STARTED WORKING AT THE AGE OF 10 FOR FARAH'S GREAT-GRANDPARENTS.

SHE WAS THERE WHEN SONIA, FARAH'S GRANDMOTHER, WAS BORN.


ANHALA!
Three coffees, if you please!
And don't forget to press the master's pants.
ANHALA!
When you're done polishing the silver, pick up some onions and parsley and make the tabbouleh for tonight! (Did you clean Sonia's room?)
ANHALA!

SHE WAS THERE WHEN LENA, FARAH'S MOTHER, WAS BORN.

AND WHEN FARAH WAS BORN.

SONIA, LENA, AND FARAH... ANHALA HAD RAISED THREE GENERATIONS OF WOMEN. WHEN FARAH WAS PREGNANT, ANHALA STAYED AT HER SIDE.

SHE APPEARED IN OUR BUILDING ONE DAY WITH FARAH AND HER HUSBAND, RAMZI.

AFTER THEY WERE MARRIED, FARAH AND RAMZI HAD LIVED FOR A WHILE WITH FARAH'S PARENTS, WHO OWNED A LARGE APARTMENT.

ONE NIGHT, WHEN THEY WERE ALL TAKING SHELTER IN THEIR BUILDING, A SHELL DROPPED RIGHT IN THEIR LIVING ROOM, AND THE WHOLE PLACE WENT UP IN FLAMES.

FARAH'S PARENTS LEFT THE COUNTRY THE NEXT DAY. THEY MOVED TO PARIS—TO A LITTLE STUDIO IN THE 16TH ARRONDISSEMENT—TO WAIT UNTIL THE SITUATION IN LEBANON SETTLED DOWN.

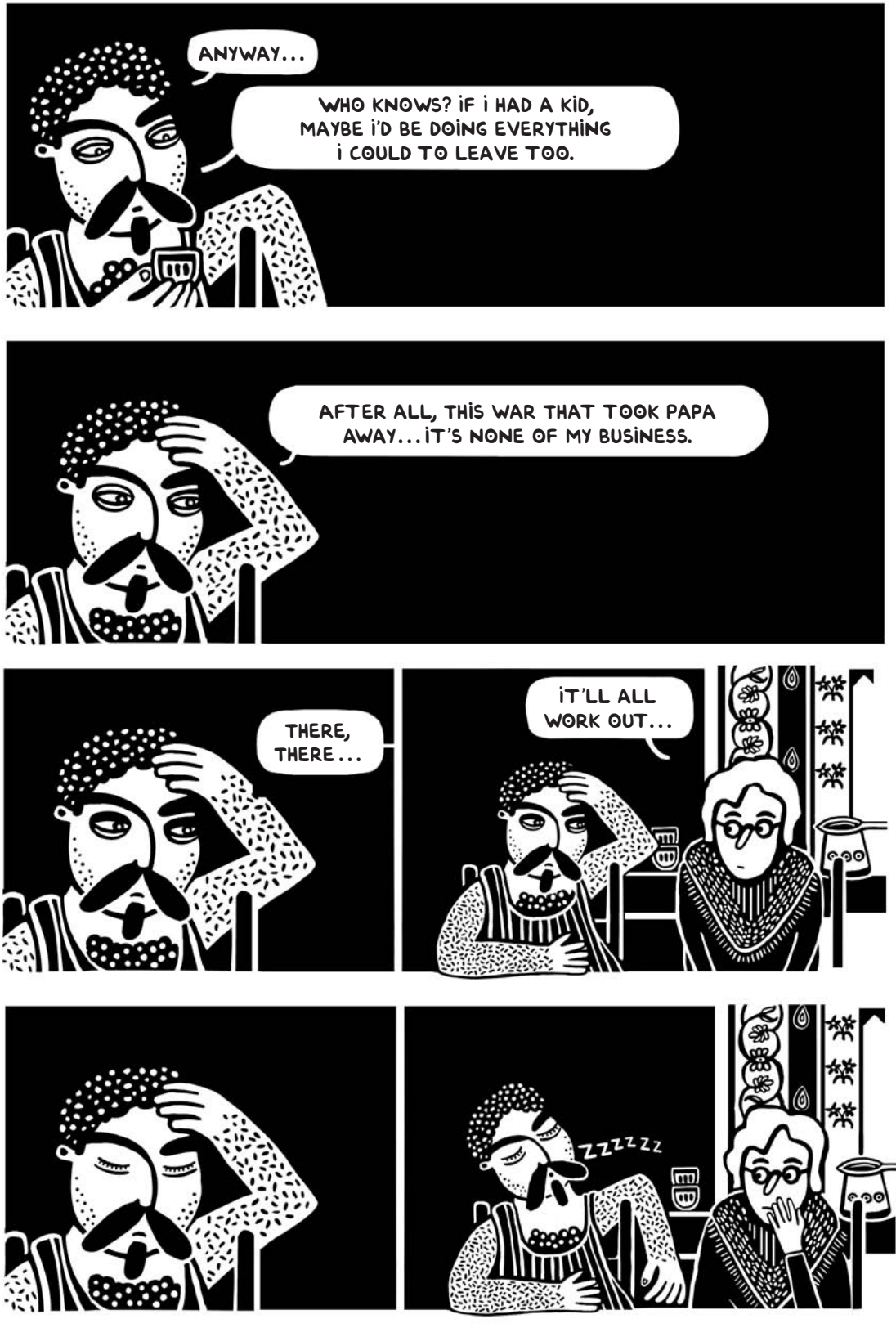
THEY LEFT ANHALA BEHIND.

FARAH AND RAMZI, WHO WERE COUNTING ON EMIGRATING TO CANADA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, DECIDED TO LIVE TEMPORARILY ON THE THIRD FLOOR OF OUR BUILDING, IN WHAT HAD BEEN THE OFFICE OF RAMZI'S ARCHITECT FATHER.

THEY BROUGHT WHAT LITTLE CLOTHING THEY STILL HAD IN THEIR SUITCASES AND AN OLD SHOE BOX THAT HELD THE PHOTOS FROM THEIR MARRIAGE.

THEY'D MANAGED TO SAVE FARAH'S MOST TREASURED POSSESSIONS FROM THE FLAMES.

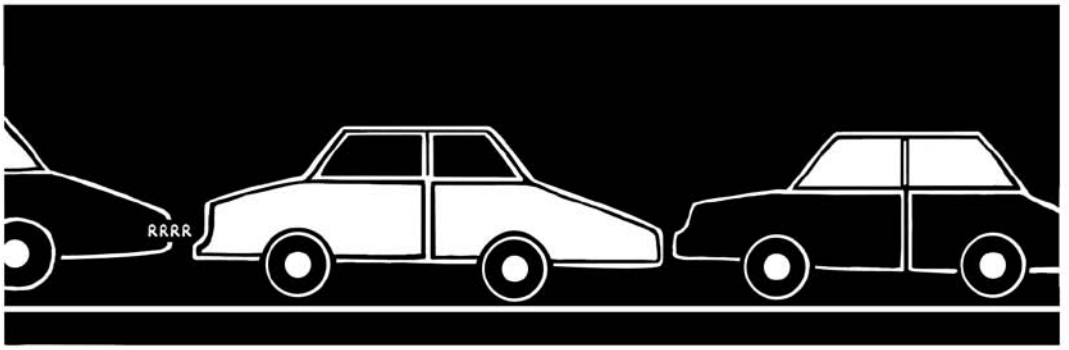
NO, THEY'LL GO ON WITHOUT ME... I'M TOO OLD TO MAKE BIG CHANGES NOW.
YOU YOUNG PEOPLE, YOU CAN STILL LEAVE AND SAVE YOUR FUTURE.
hm
OR STAY... AND TRY TO SAVE THE COUNTRY!
hm
SHLLRRP
BUT, YOU KNOW...
SOMETIMES I WONDER IF MAYBE THEY HAVE THE RIGHT IDEA.

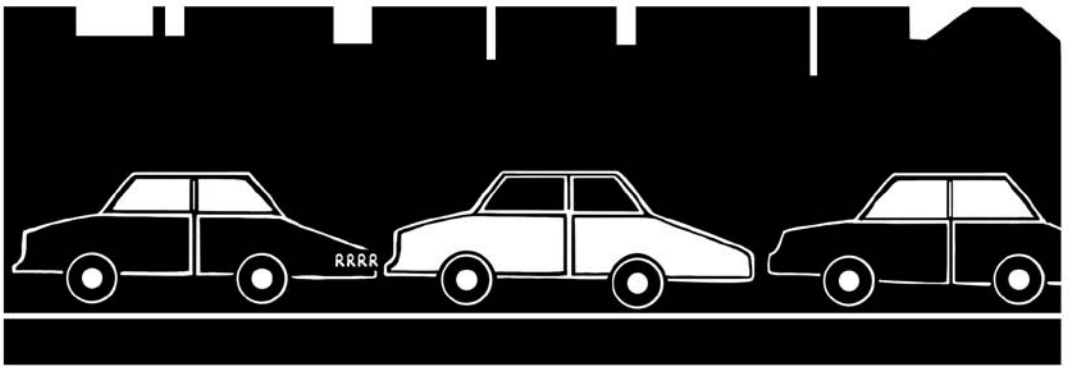

ANYWAY...
WHO KNOWS? IF I HAD A KID, MAYBE I'D BE DOING EVERYTHING I COULD TO LEAVE TOO.
AFTER ALL, THIS WAR THAT TOOK PAPA AWAY... IT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS.
THERE, THERE...
IT'LL ALL WORK OUT...
ZZZZZZ

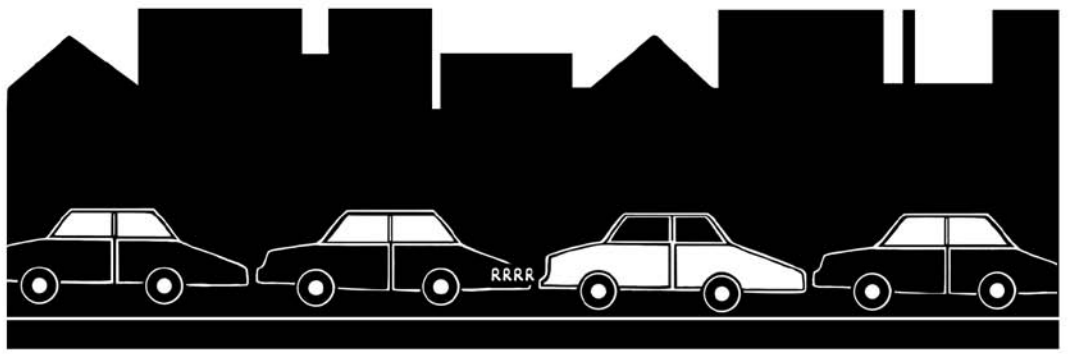
WHEN HIS MOTHER DECIDED TO LEAVE BEIRUT AND TAKE HIS SISTERS TO LIVE WHERE IT WAS CALMER—BACK TO THE VILLAGE WHERE SHE'D GROWN UP ON THE NORTHERN COAST OF LEBANON—CHUCRI GOT HIS FATHER'S CAR OUTOF THE BUILDING'S GARAGE. HE PATCHED IT UP, CLEANED IT OUT, AND PUT A DRIVER'S SEAT BACK IN.

THE LITTLE APARTMENT ON THE GROUND FLOOR WAS MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE NOW WITH ONLY ONE PERSON IN IT, BUT CHUCRI SPENT MORE TIME IN HIS CAR THAN AT HOME.

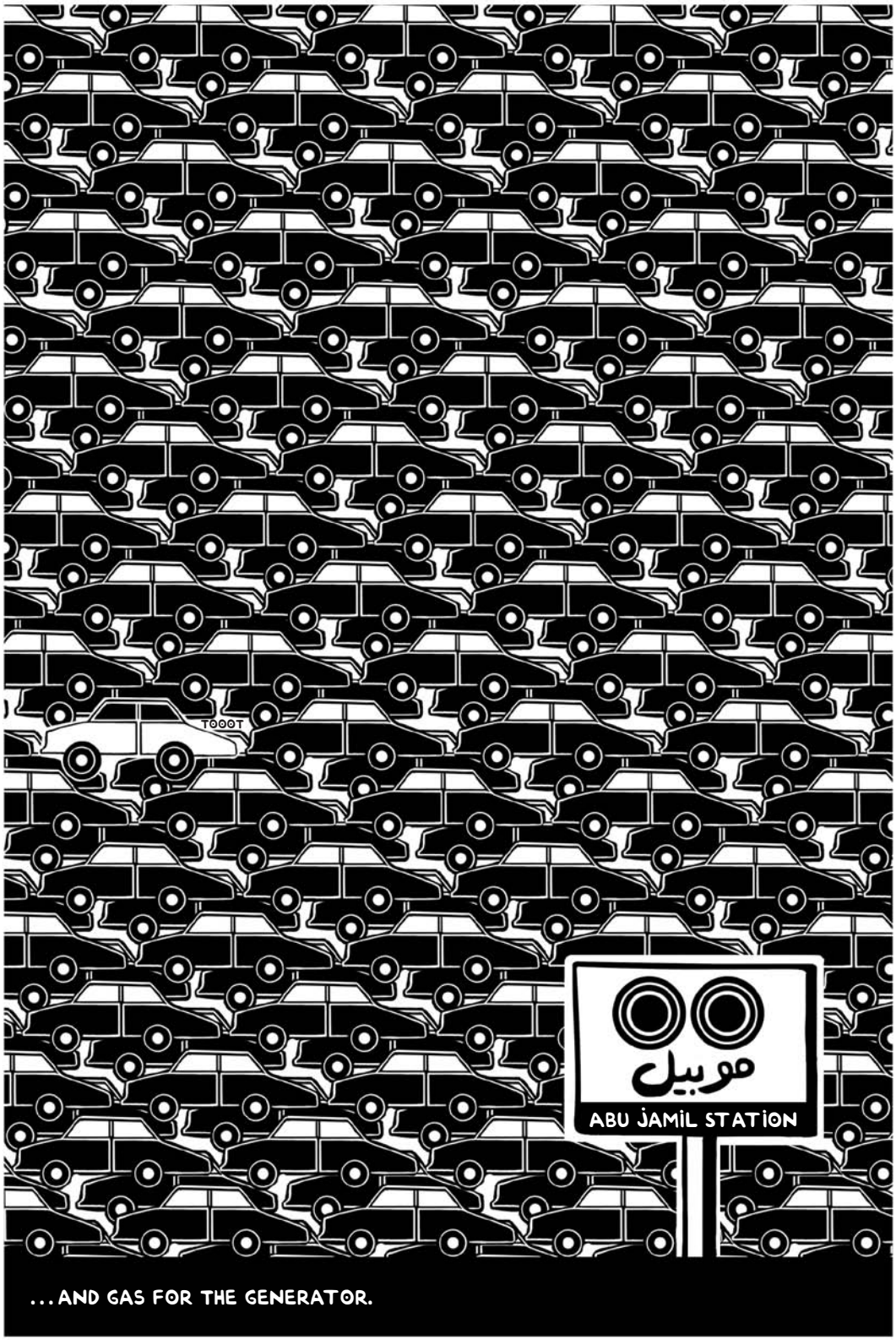
DURING CEASE-FIRES, HE WOULD ROAM THE DESERTED CITY...



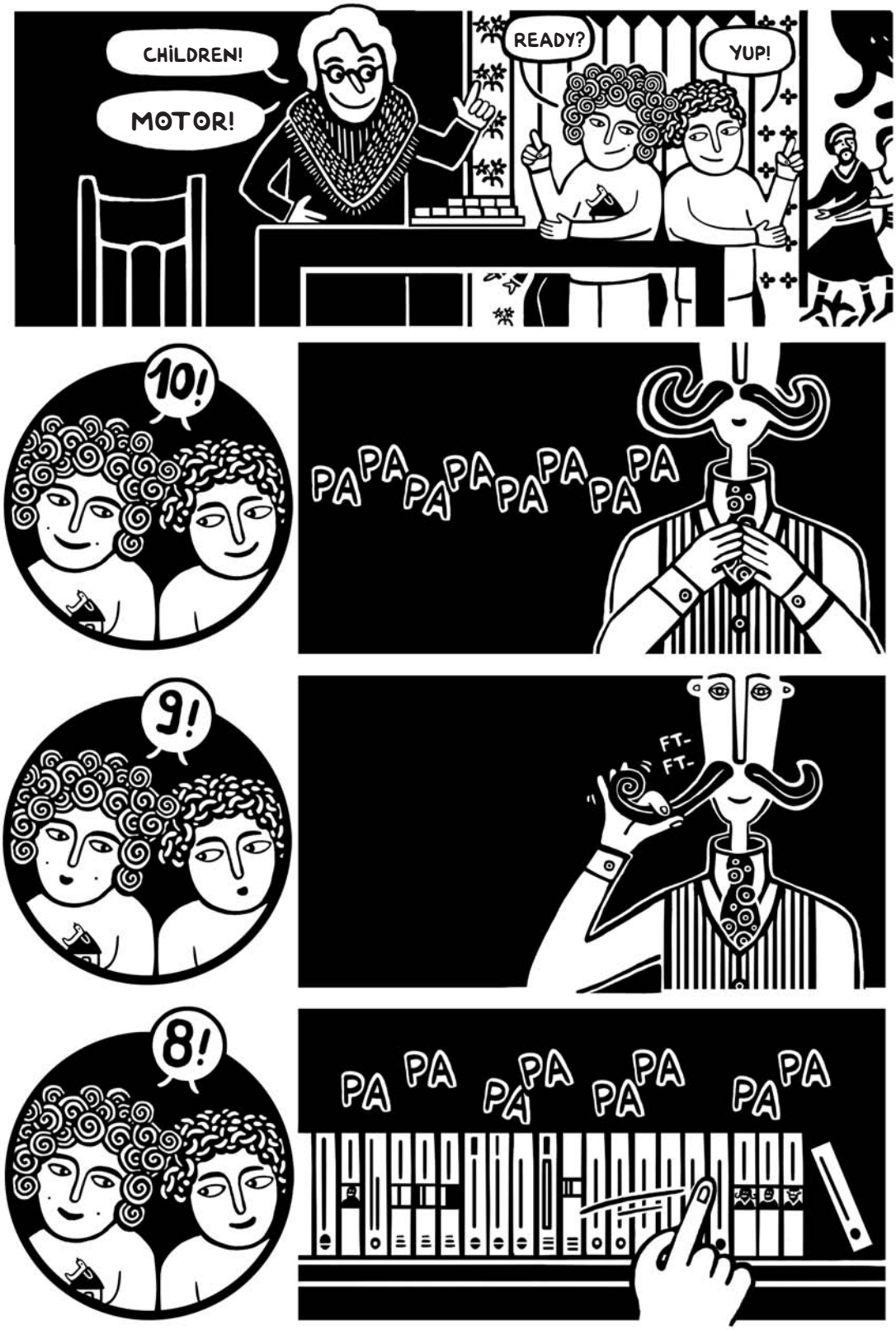


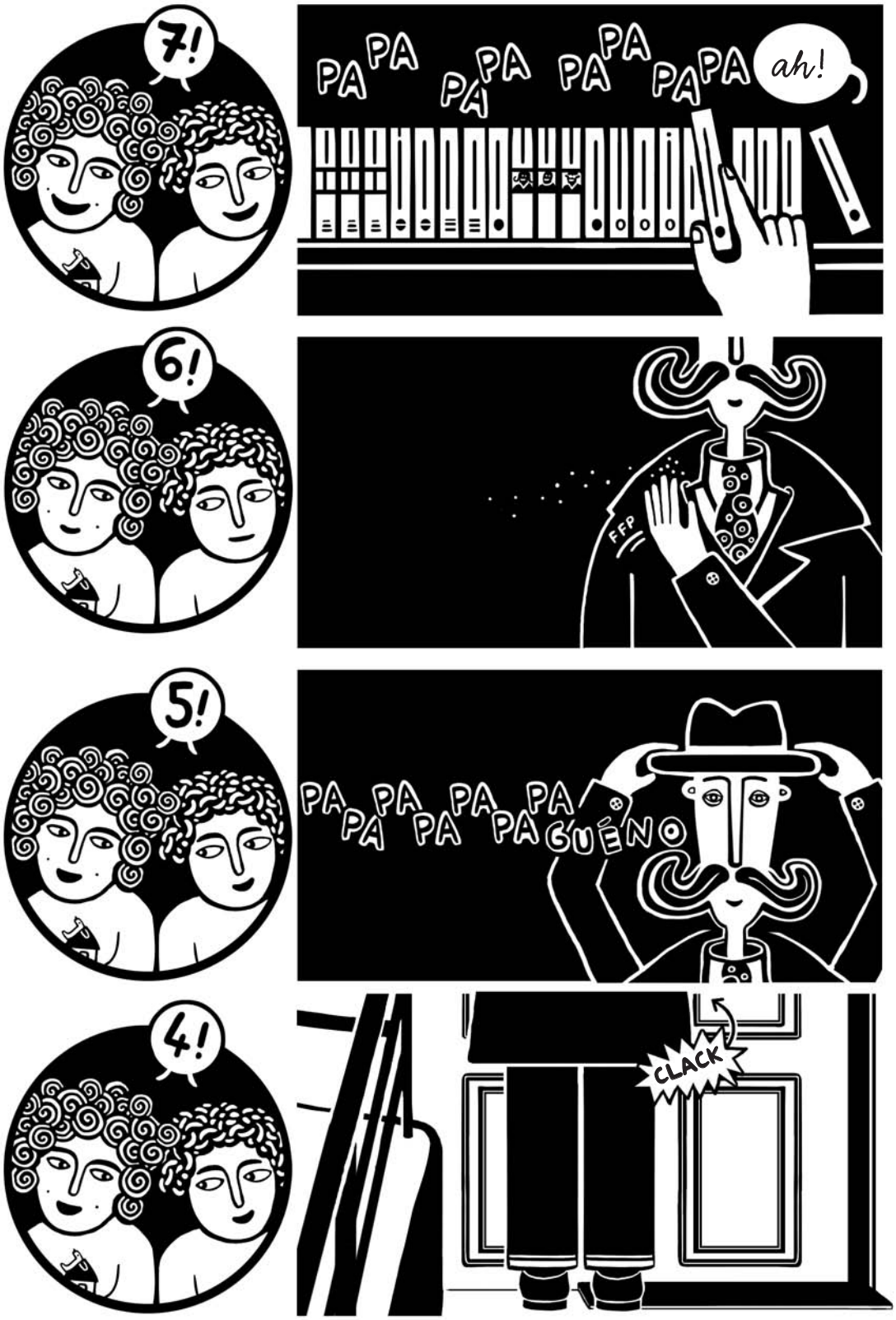


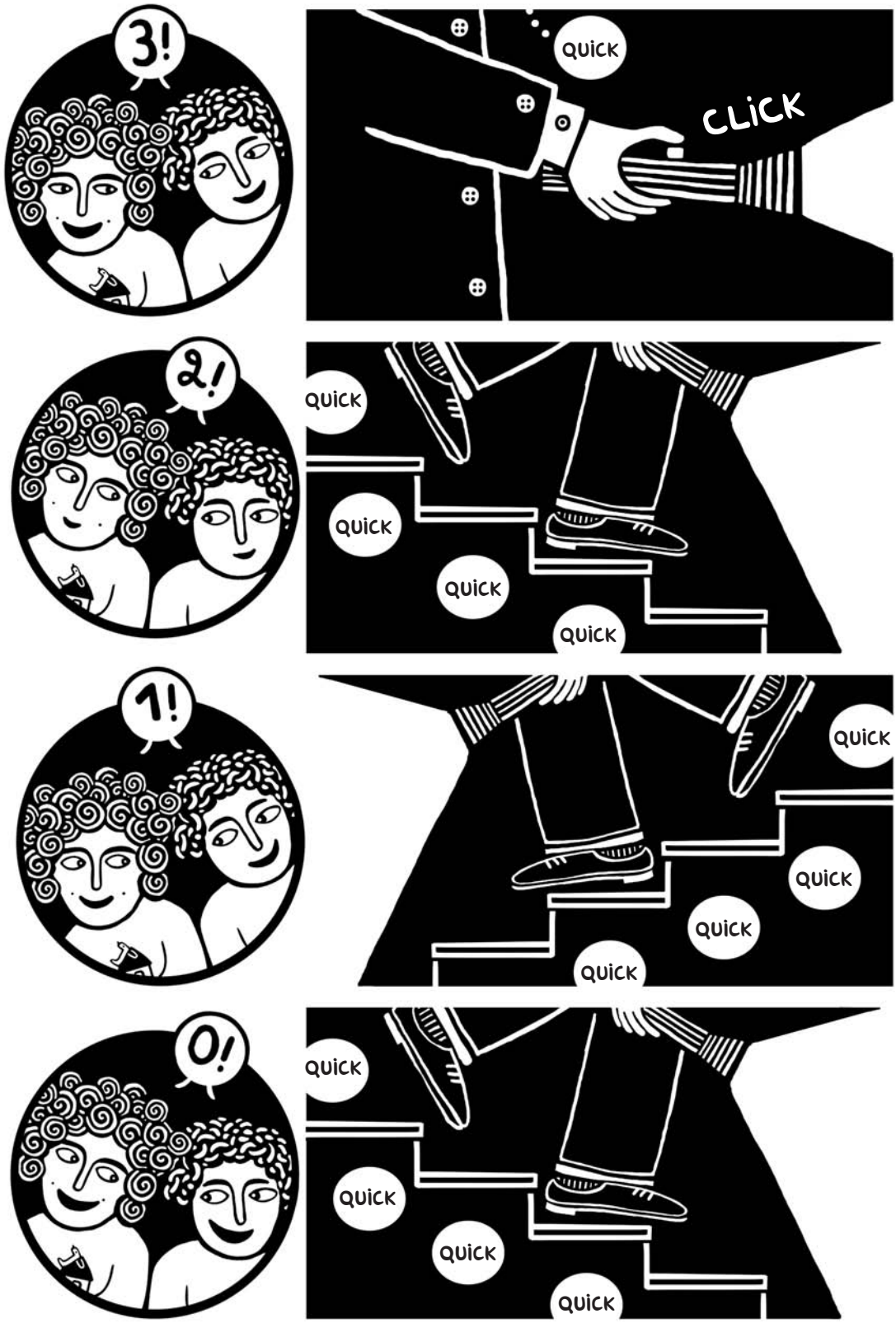
...OR WAIT IN LINE IN FRONT OF STORES FOR BREAD, RICE, SUGAR, CANNED FOOD, CIGARETTES, COFFEE, MATCHES, CANDLES, GAS CANISTERS FOR CAMP STOVES, BATTERIES FOR FLASHLIGHTS, AND RADIOS...


TOOOT
موبيل
ABU JAMIL STATION
...AND GAS FOR THE GENERATOR.

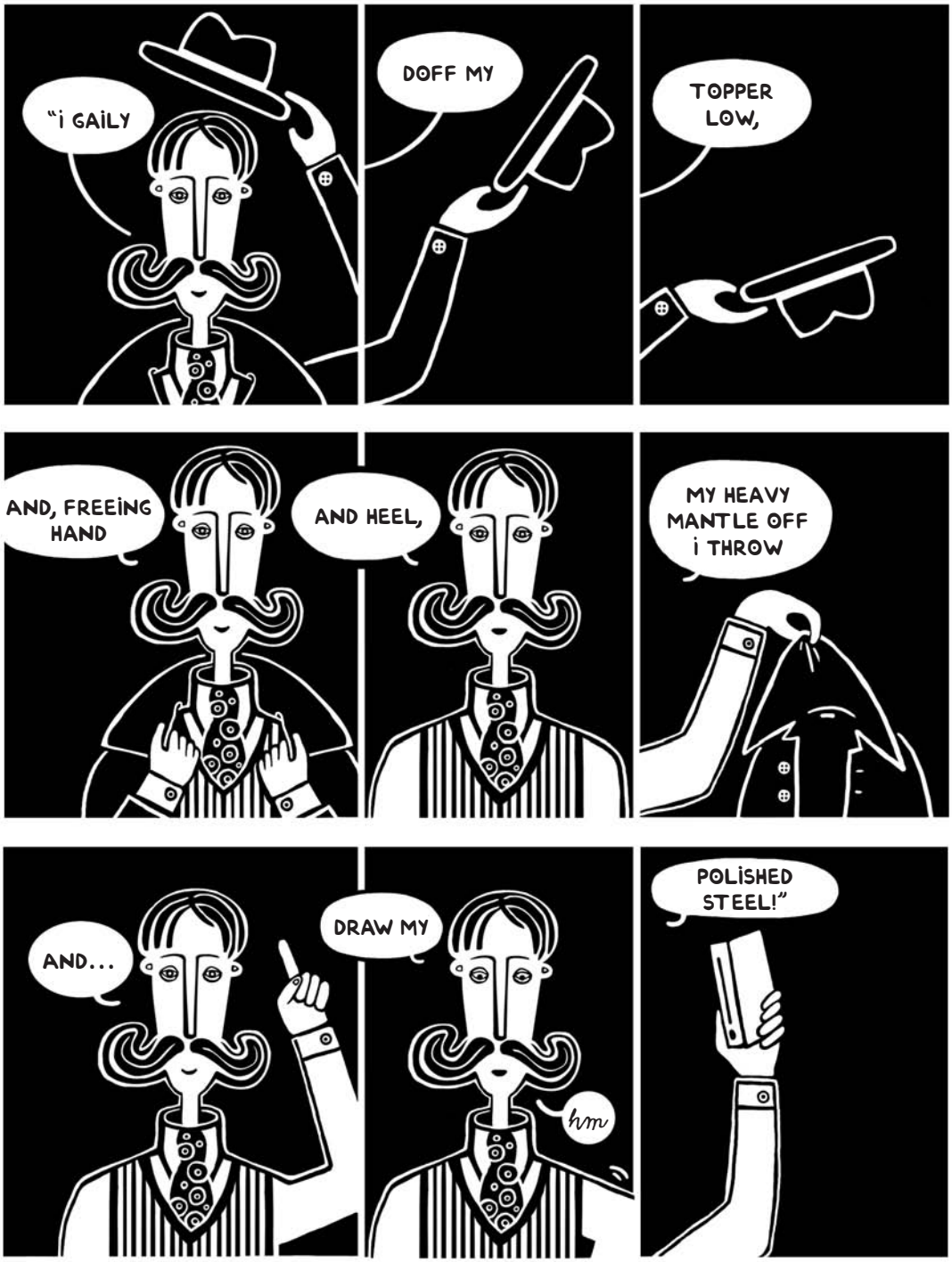
AFTER TAKING THE SFOUF OUT OF THE OVEN, ANHALA CUT IT INTO LITTLE DIAMOND-SHAPED PIECES, AND THE WHOLE FOYER SMELLED LIKE CURCUMA.


CHILDREN!
MOTOR!
READY?
YUP!
10!
PA PA PA PA PA PA PA
9!
FT-
FT-
8!
PA PA PA PA PA PA PA


7!
PA PA PA PA PA PA PA PA
ah!
6!
FFP
5!
PA PA PA PA PA PA PA PA GUÉNO
4!
CLACK


3!
QUICK
CLICK
2!
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
1!
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
0!
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK

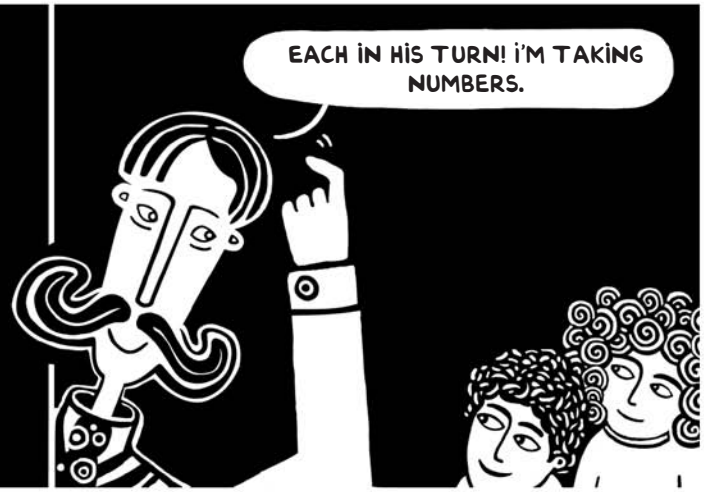
QUICK
TAP
TAP
TAP
EVERY NIGHT, EXACTLY 10 SECONDS AFTER THE MOTOR STARTED WITH A VROOOOOOM, ERNEST CHALLITA WOULD TAP ON THE GLASS OF OUR DOOR WITH HIS KEY.
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
QUICK
THERE HE IS!
GOOD EVENING, CHILDREN.
GOOD EVENING, ANHALA.

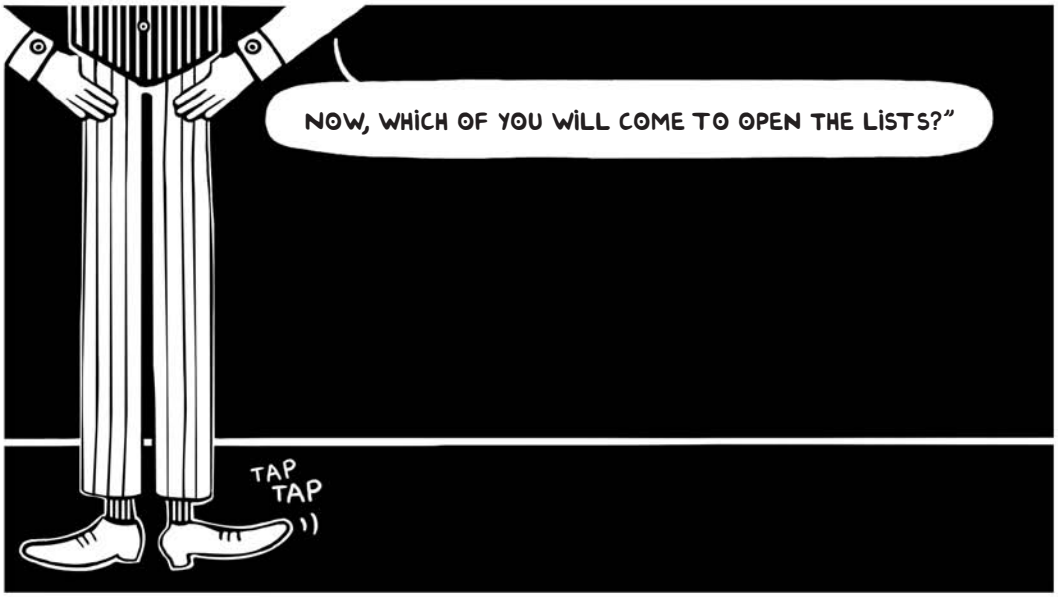


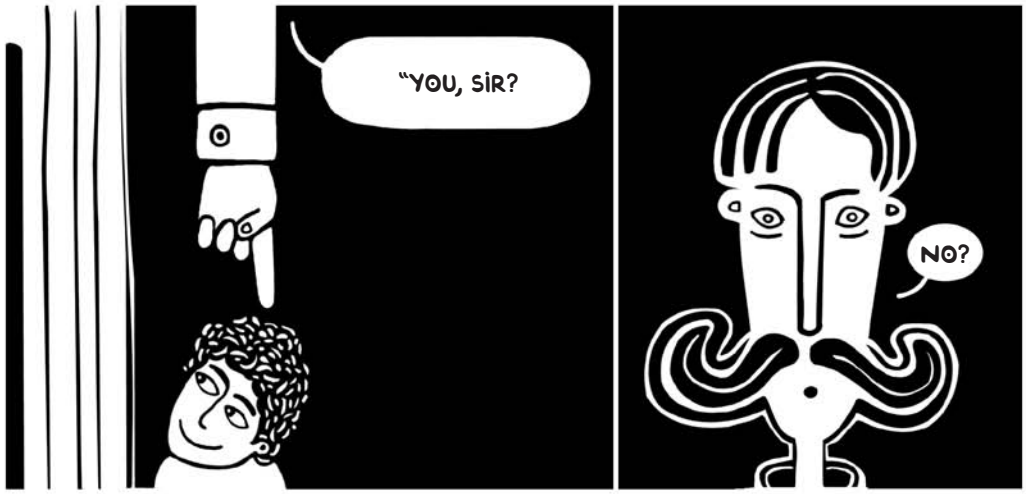
ERNEST CHALLITA WAS OUR FOURTH-FLOOR NEIGHBOR. BEFORE THE WAR, HE TAUGHT FRENCH AT THE HIGH SCHOOL ON BAYDOUN STREET.

ERNEST KNEW WHOLE SECTIONS OF *CYRANO DE BERGERAC* BY HEART.

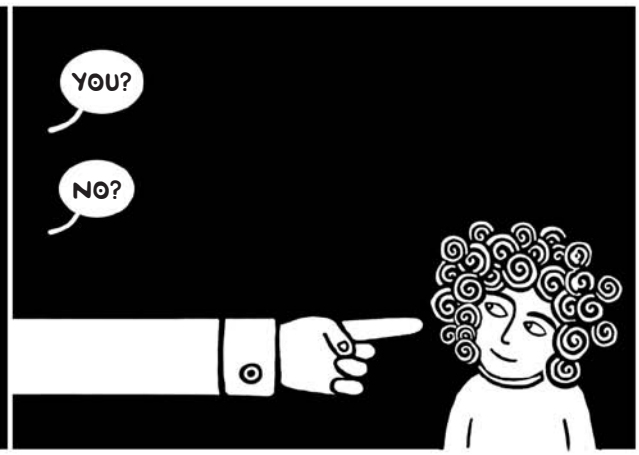
EVERY NIGHT, IN THE FOYER, HE'D PERFORM A SCENE FOR US. (HE WAS AFRAID OF MEMORY LAPSES, SO HE ALWAYS BROUGHT THE BOOK WITH HIM, BUT HE NEVER NEEDED IT.)

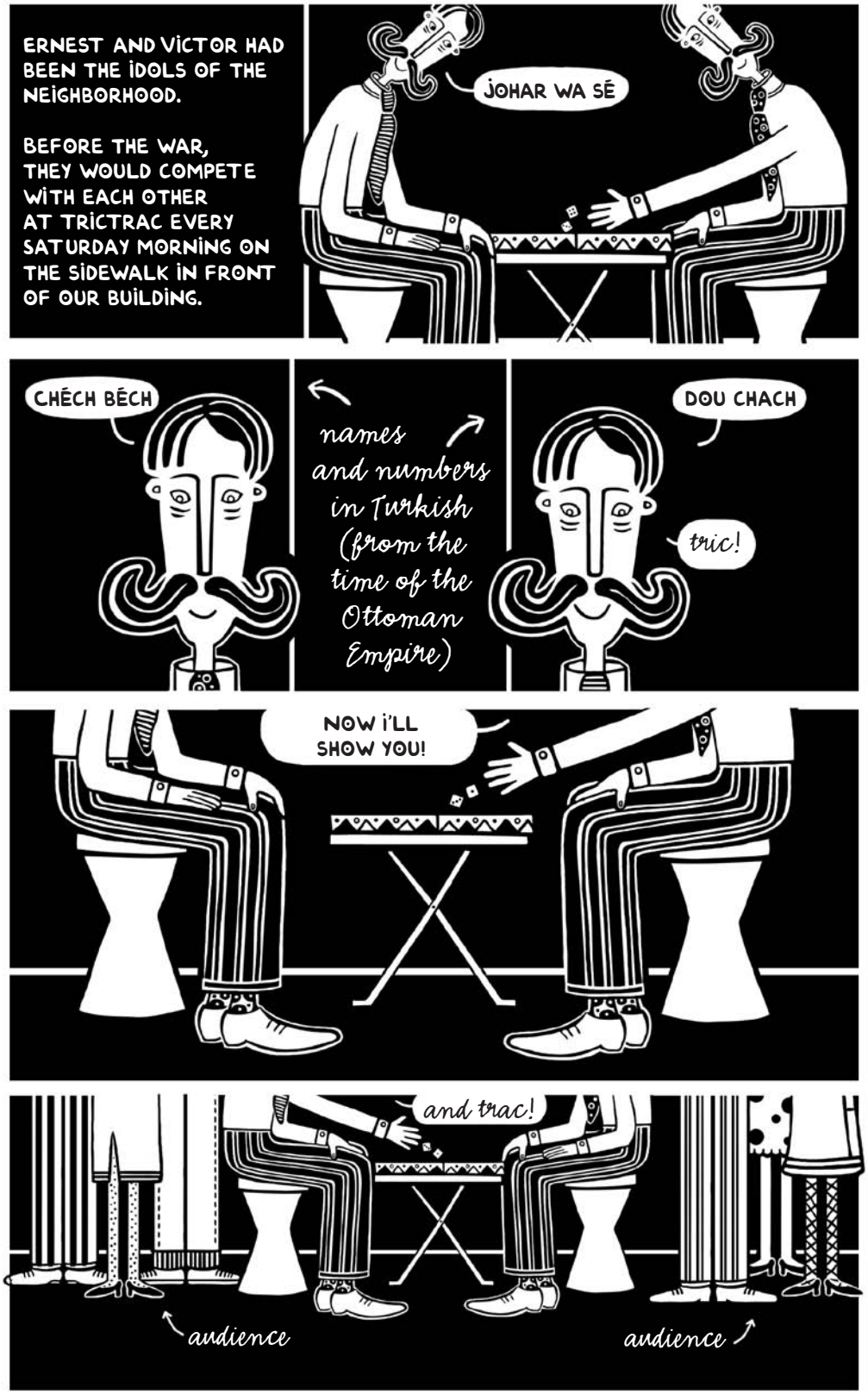






EVER SINCE HIS TWIN BROTHER, VICTOR, DIED, ERNEST NEVER LEFT HIS APARTMENT, EXCEPT TO COME DOWN TO OUR FOYER.




ERNEST AND VICTOR HAD BEEN THE IDOLS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD.
BEFORE THE WAR, THEY WOULD COMPETE WITH EACH OTHER AT TRICTRAC EVERY SATURDAY MORNING ON THE SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF OUR BUILDING.
JOHAR WA SÉ
CHÉCH BÉCH
names and numbers in Turkish (from the time of the Ottoman Empire)
DOU CHACH
tric!
NOW I'LL SHOW YOU!
and trac!
audience
audience

ERNEST AND VICTOR WERE VERY SPIFFY DRESSERS.

THE ONLY WAY TO TELL THEM APART (ASIDE FROM THE FACT THAT VICTOR WAS A TEENSY BIT SHORTER THAN ERNEST) WAS TO LOOK FOR THE INITIALS HAND-EMBROIDERED ON THEIR CUSTOM-MADE SHIRTS FROM ALBERT, THE TAILOR ON ABDEL WAHAB EL-INGLIZI STREET.

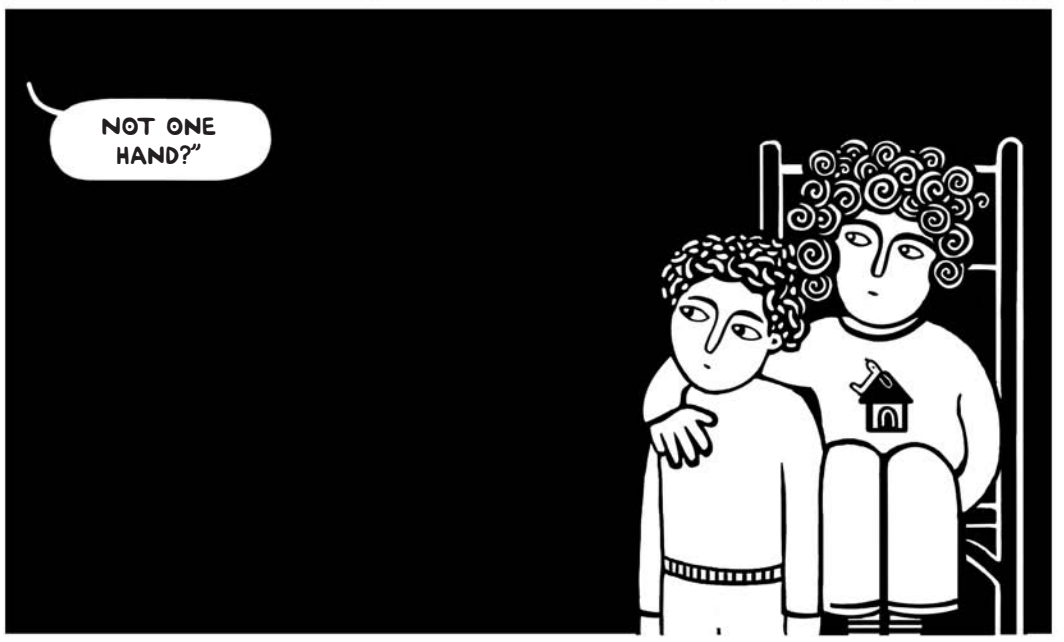
ERNEST HAD AN IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION OF TIES.
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, WHEN EVERYONE ELSE WAS IN THEIR NIGHTGOWNS OR PAJAMAS, HE WAS ALWAYS ELEGANTLY TURNED OUT, EVEN JUST TO COME DOWN TO OUR FOYER.

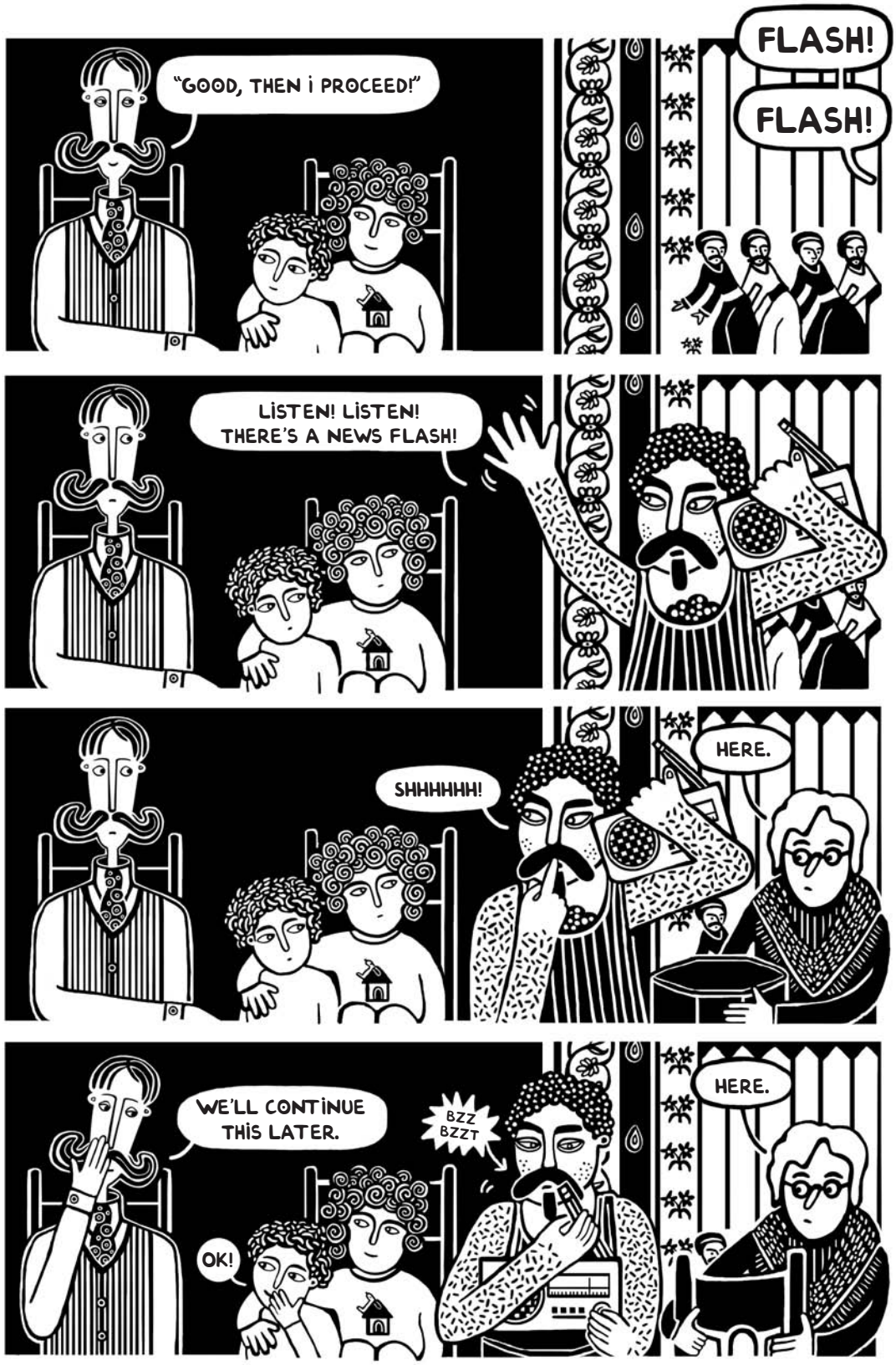
ONE AFTERNOON, VICTOR WAS KILLED BY A SNIPER.

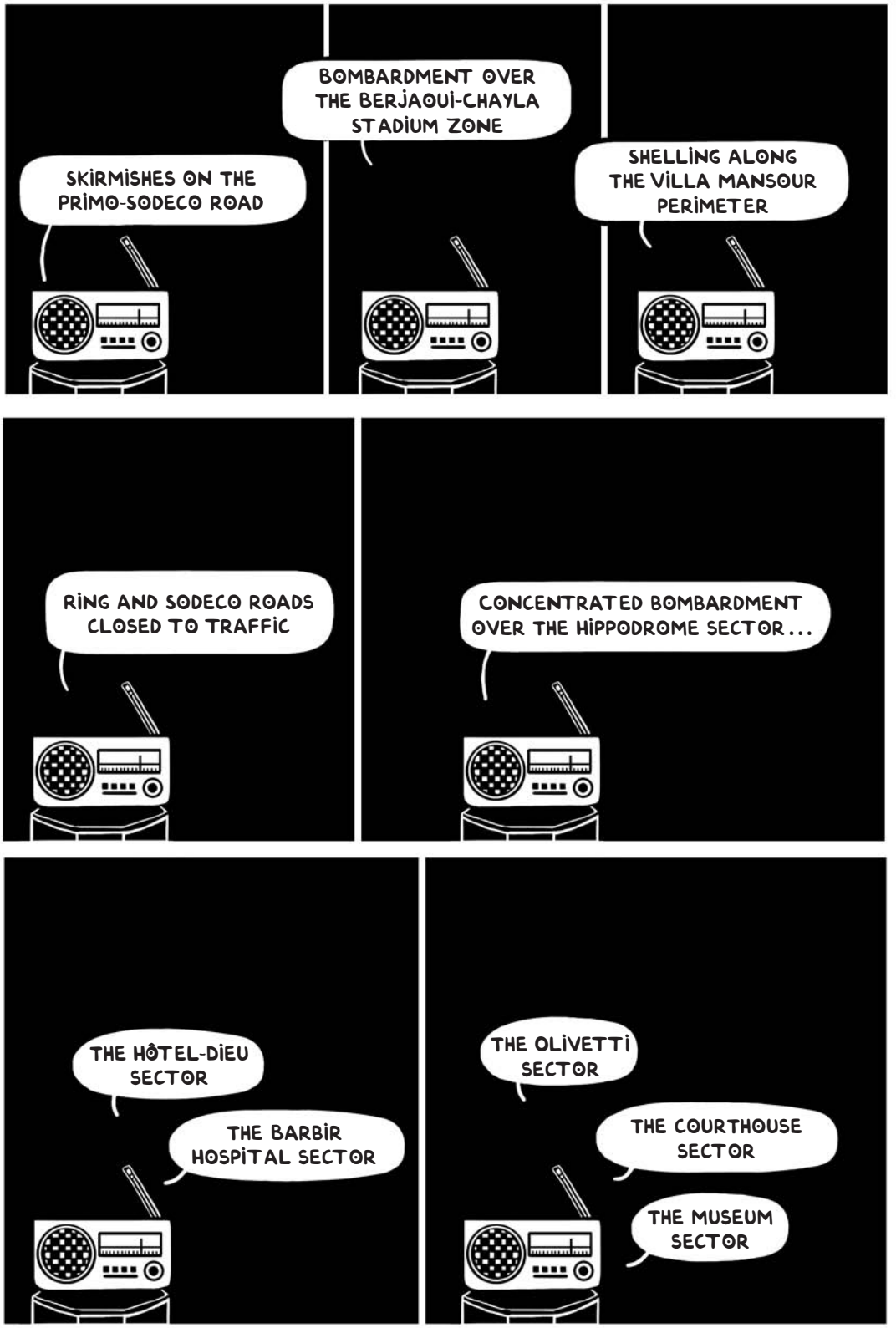
HIS BODY LAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET ALL NIGHT.

THE NEXT DAY, CHUCRI BROUGHT THE BODY BACK TO ERNEST.

TWO DAYS LATER, CONTAINERS WERE SET UP IN THE STREET TO PROTECT PEDESTRIANS.




"GOOD, THEN I PROCEED!"
FLASH!
FLASH!
LISTEN! LISTEN!
THERE'S A NEWS FLASH!
SHHHHHH!
HERE.
WE'LL CONTINUE THIS LATER.
BZZ BZZT
OK!
HERE.


SKIRMISHES ON THE PRIMO-SODECO ROAD
BOMBARDMENT OVER THE BERJAOUI-CHAYLA STADIUM ZONE
SHELLING ALONG THE VILLA MANSOUR PERIMETER
RING AND SODECO ROADS CLOSED TO TRAFFIC
CONCENTRATED BOMBARDMENT OVER THE HIPPODROME SECTOR...
THE HÔTEL-DIEU SECTOR
THE BARBIR HOSPITAL SECTOR
THE OLIVETTI SECTOR
THE COURTHOUSE SECTOR
THE MUSEUM SECTOR

OCTOBER 1975,
MUSEUM ROAD

TELL YOUR MOTHER I'M COMING.

RRRRR...

قف
حاجز

RRRRR...

STOP!

NAME?

RRRRR...

SAÏD NAHAS.

RRRRR...

NAHAS...
NAHAS...

RRRRR...

WHERE'D YOU COME FROM, NAHAS?

RRRRR...

BEIRUT.

RRRRR...

TO CROSS FROM ONE SIDE OF THE DEMARCATION LINE TO THE OTHER, YOU HAD TO TAKE ONE OF THE ROADS WITH CHECKPOINTS AT ARMED ROADBLOCKS.

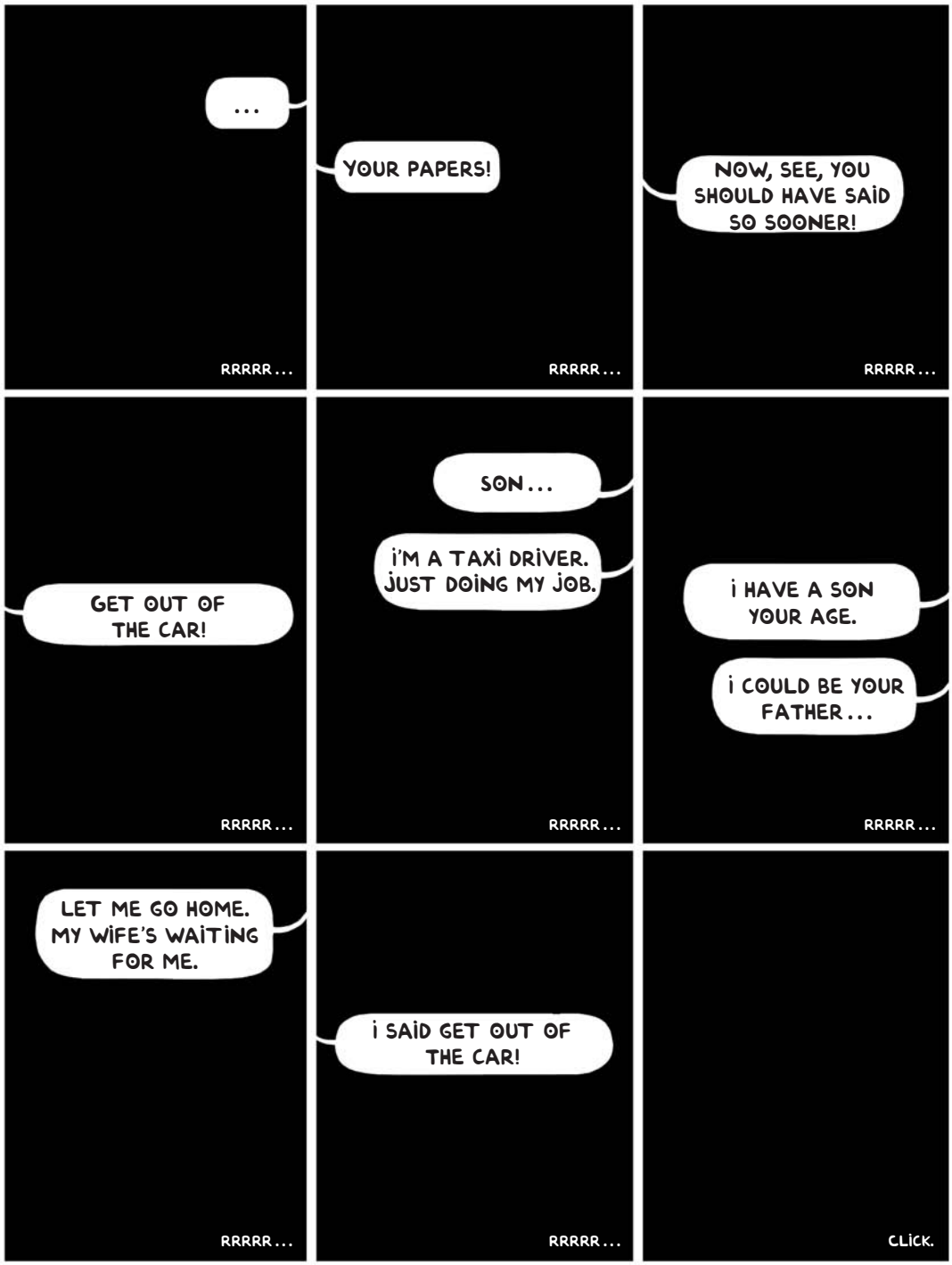
FROM BEIRUT, HUH?

RRRRR...

DON'T ACT CLEVER, SAÏD NAHAS.

FROM WHICH BEIRUT?

RRRRR...



AT THE CHECKPOINTS, YOU COULD BE ARRESTED, KIDNAPPED, OR KILLED JUST ON THE BASIS OF WHAT RELIGION WAS LISTED ON YOUR IDENTITY CARD.

SKIRMISHES ON THE PRIMO-SODECO ROAD
BOMBARDMENT OVER THE BERJAOUI-CHAYLA STADIUM ZONE
SHELLING ALONG THE VILLA MANSOUR PERIMETER
RING AND SODECO ROADS CLOSED TO TRAFFIC
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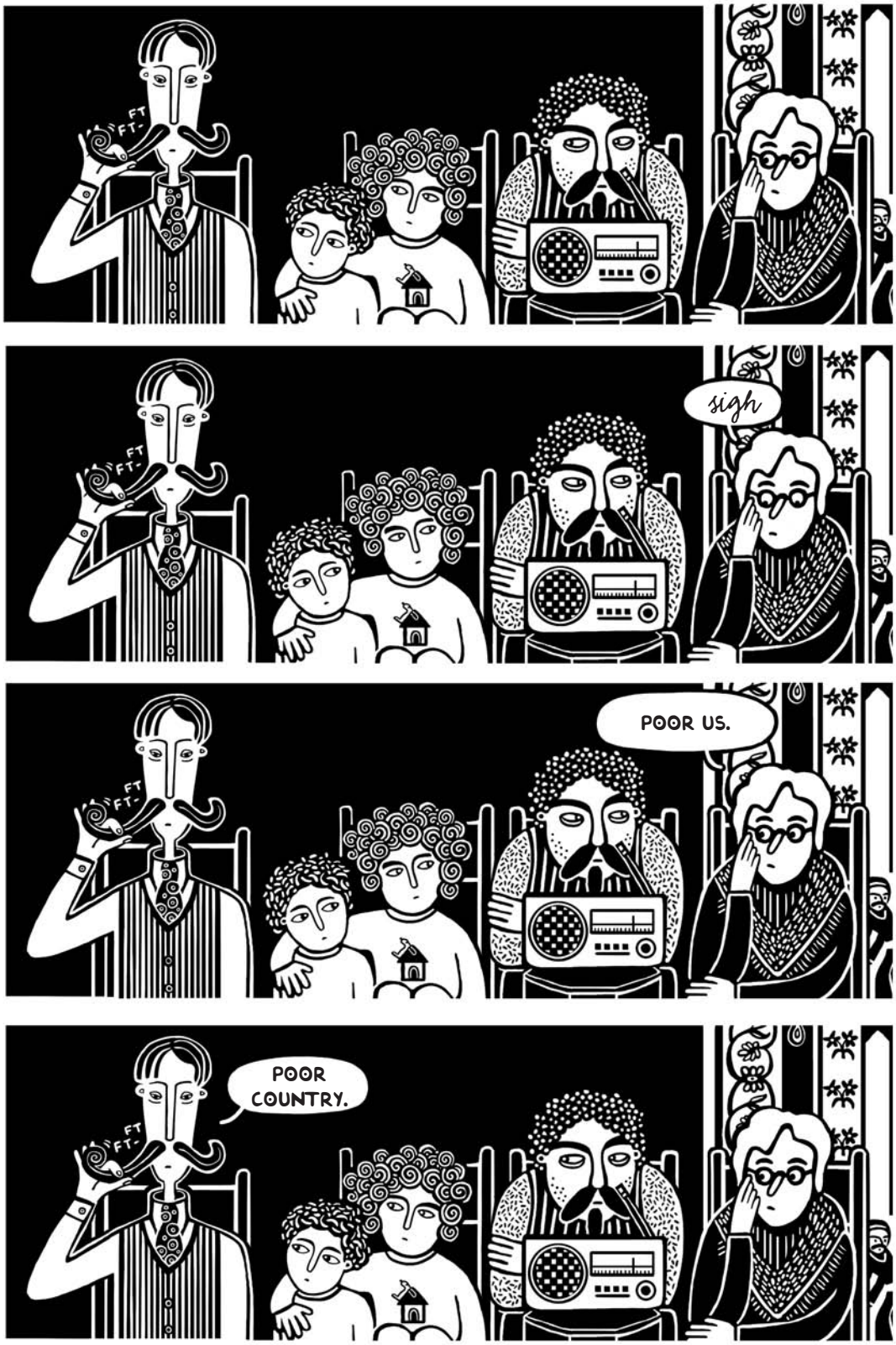
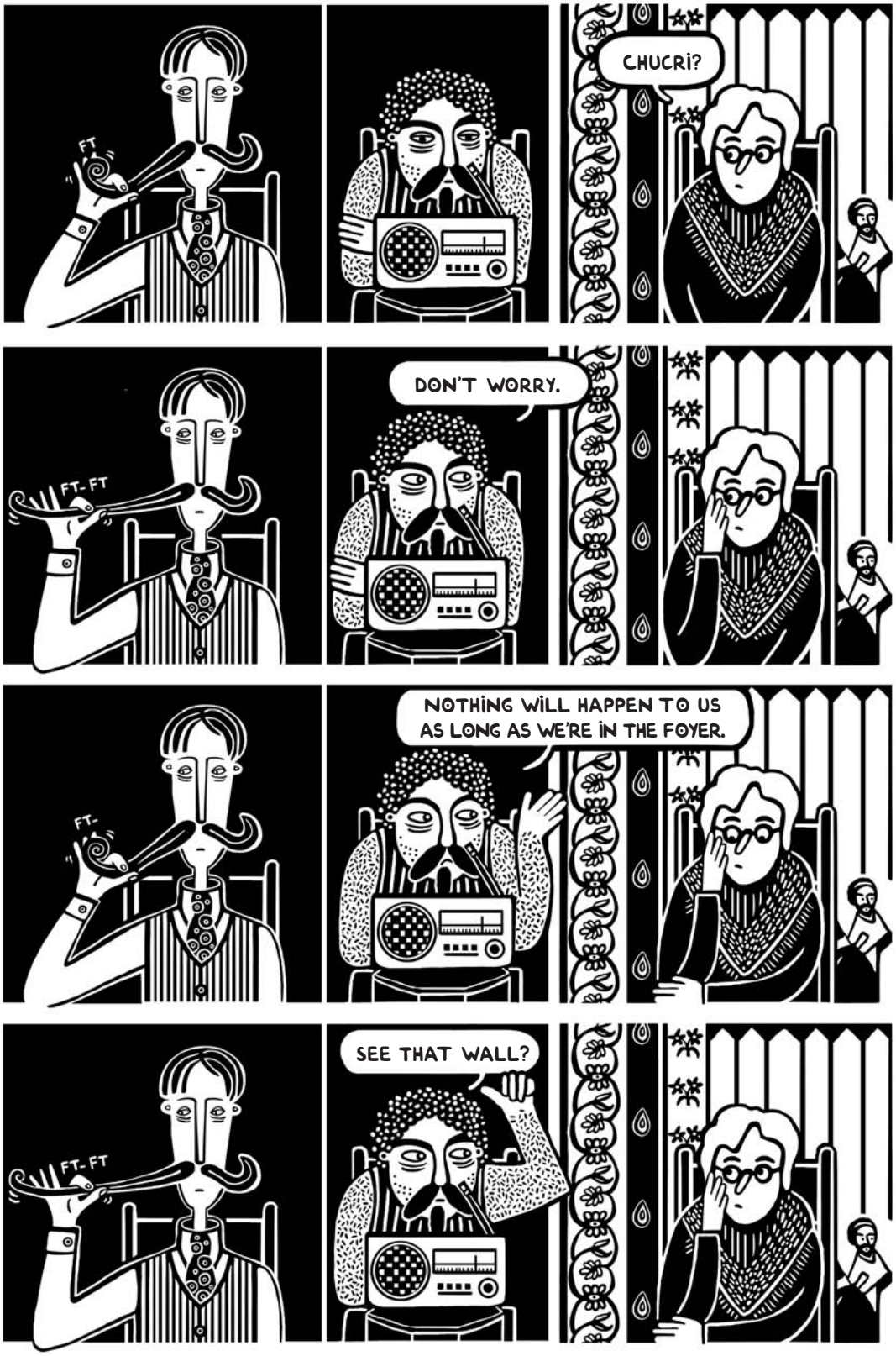
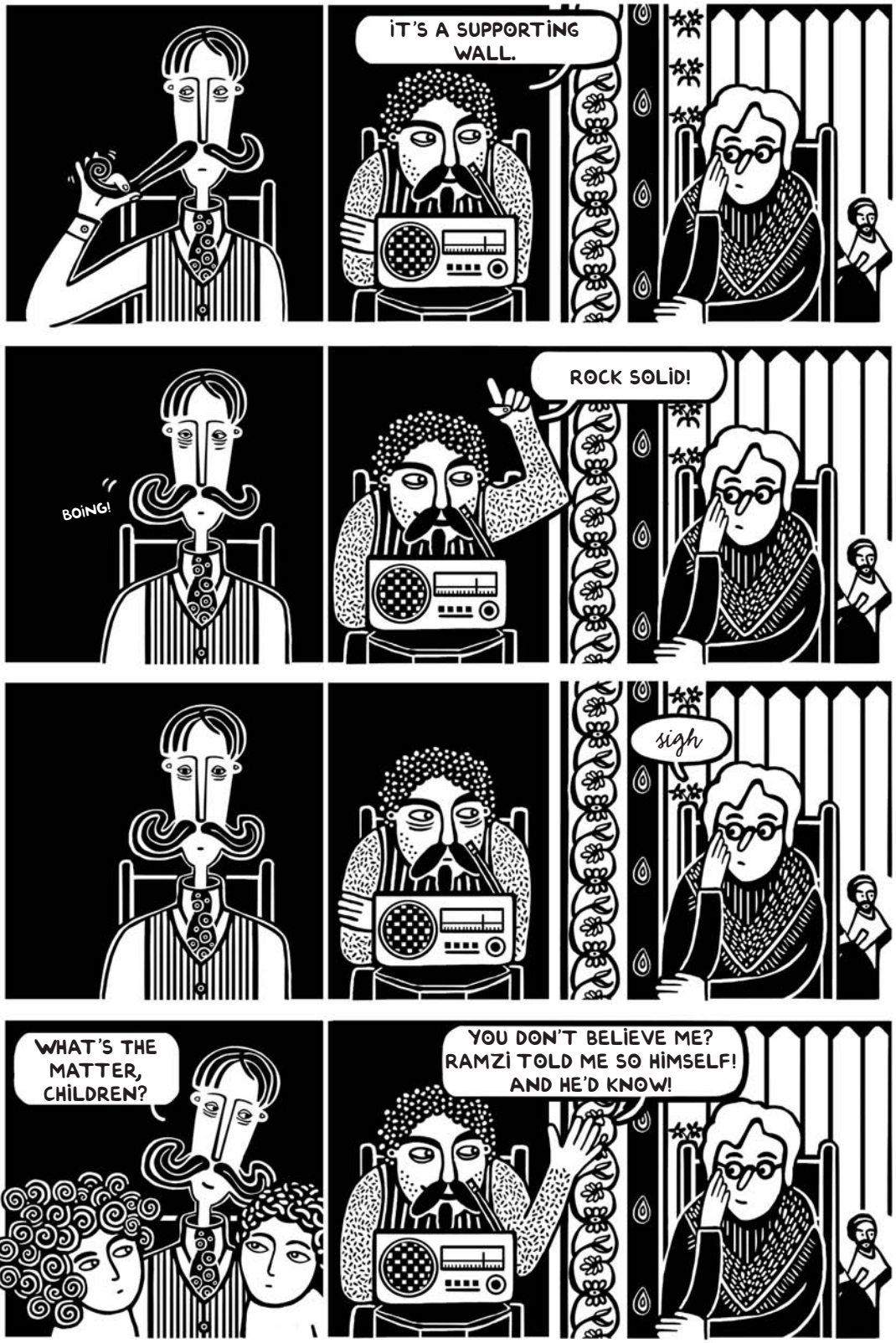
THE HÔTEL-DIEU SECTOR
THE BARBIR HOSPITAL SECTOR
THE OLIVETTI SECTOR
THE COURTHOUSE SECTOR
THE MUSEUM SECTOR
81 DEAD AND 221 WOUNDED
HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS ARE MOBILIZING
FT
FT-


FT
FT-
sigh
POOR US.
POOR COUNTRY.

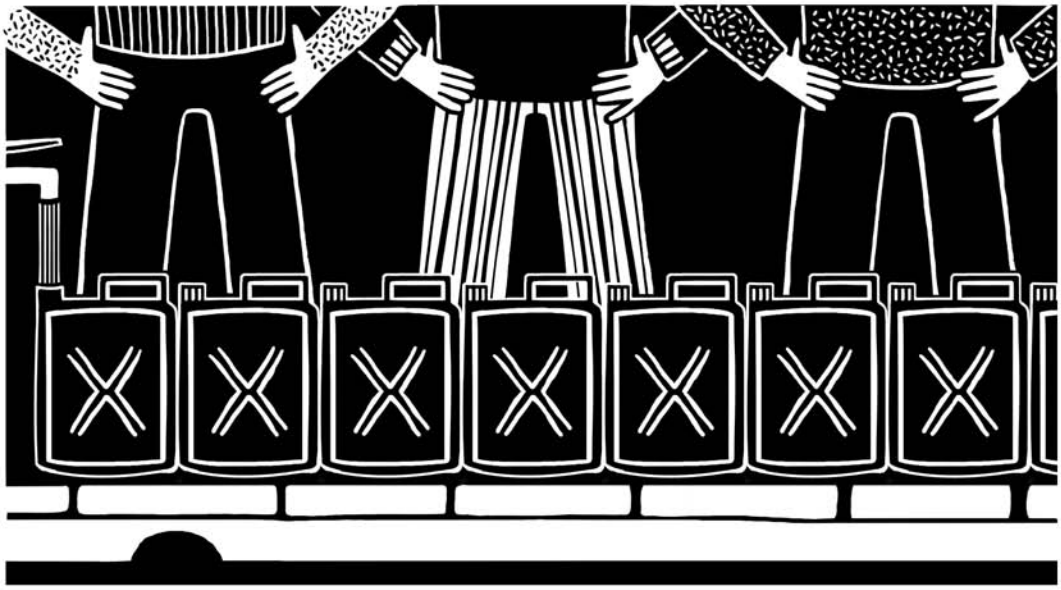

FT
CHUCRİ?
FT-FT
DON'T WORRY.
FT-
NOTHİNG WİLL HAPPEN TO US AS LONG AS WE'RE İN THE FOYER.
FT-FT
SEE THAT WALL?


IT'S A SUPPORTING WALL.
BOING!
ROCK SOLID!
sigh
WHAT'S THE MATTER, CHILDREN?
YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME? RAMZI TOLD ME SO HIMSELF! AND HE'D KNOW!

WHAT?
WELL OF COURSE, KİDDO!
OF COURSE YOUR PARENTS WİLL BE BACK!
NO...İ DON'T KNOW WHEN, MY DEAR...
BUT İT WON'T BE LONG NOW! THAT'S FOR SURE.
GO ON AND SİT DOWN, NOW.

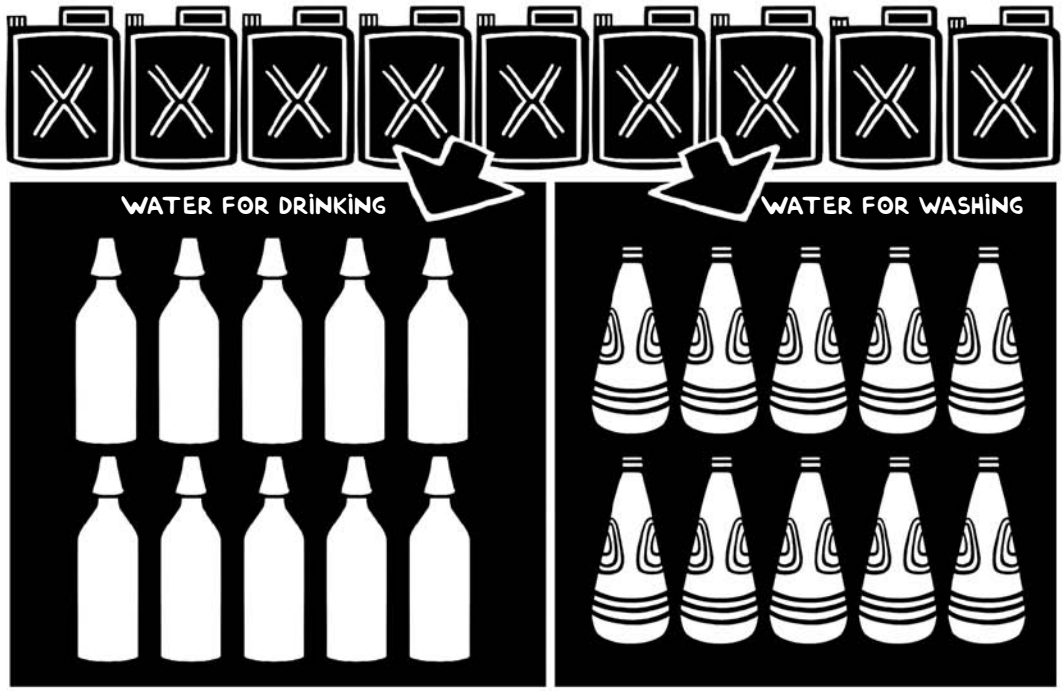
NOBODY WORRY!
I GUARANTEE THAT WE'RE ALL SAFE HERE.
hm
growl
whisper whisper

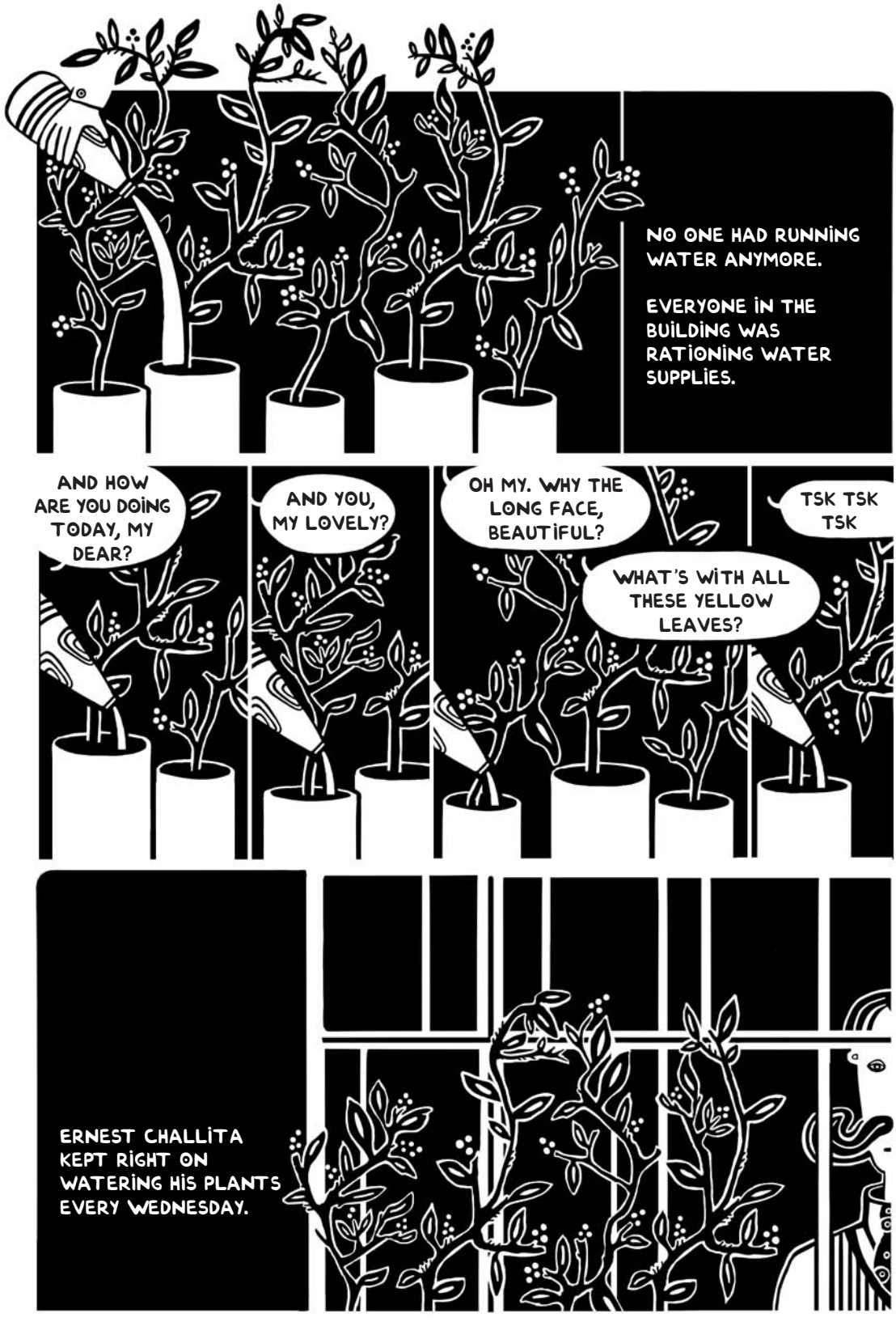
YES, MY DARLINGS.
ERNEST AND CHUCRI MUST BE HUNGRY TOO...
PLUS, CHUCRI BROUGHT US SOME LETTUCE!
ALREADY WASHED!
I'D LOVE A LITTLE WHISKEY WITH YOUR WASHED LETTUCE.
BUT OF COURSE!
WAIT, AND I'LL GO SEE WHAT KIND OF WHISKEY THEY HAVE.
TUT TUT TUT
LET'S WAIT FOR THE PROFESSIONAL, HM?
GOOD OL' ERNEST!
YOU'RE RIGHT. HE SHOULD BE DOWN ANY MINUTE NOW!

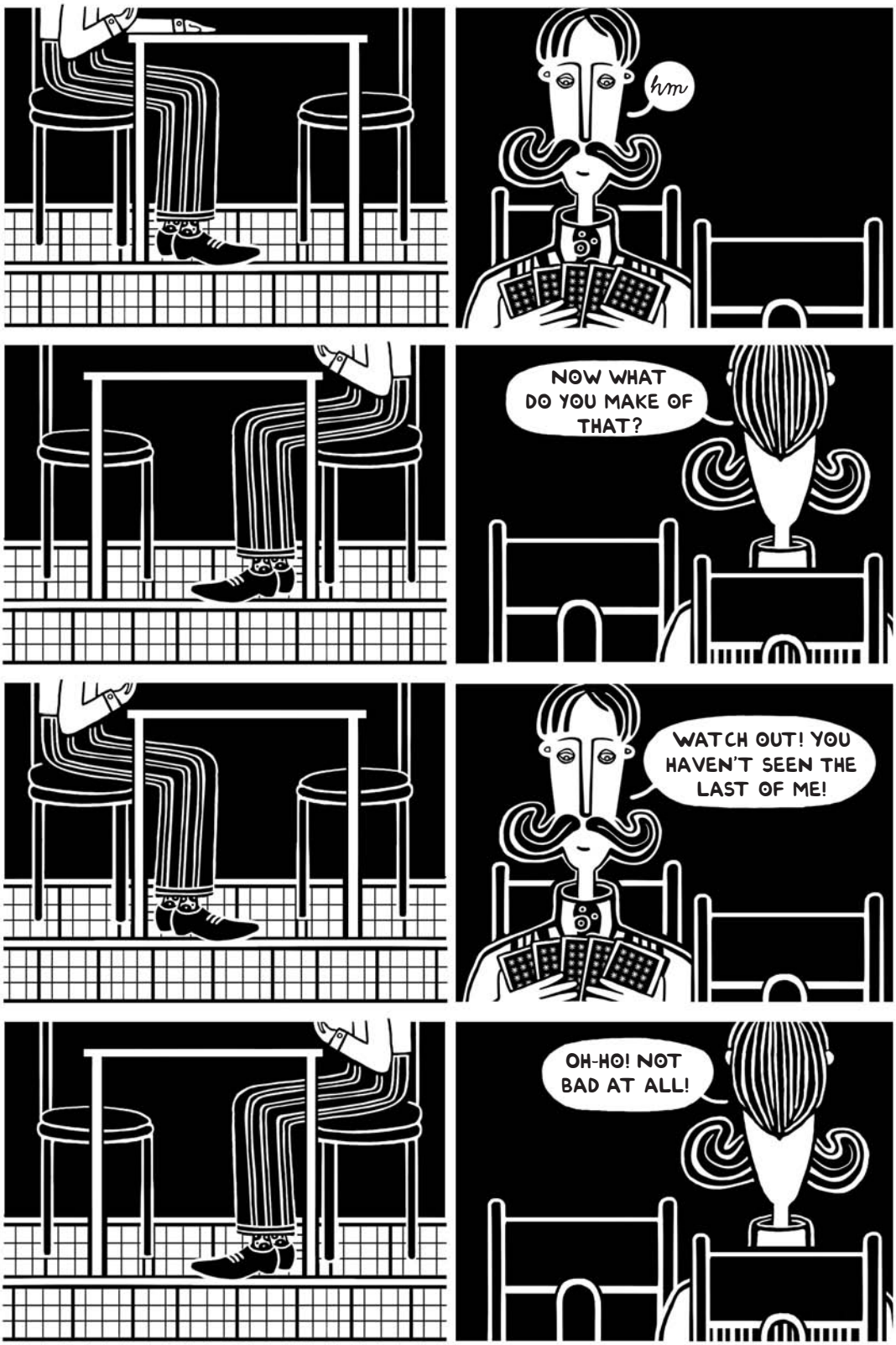


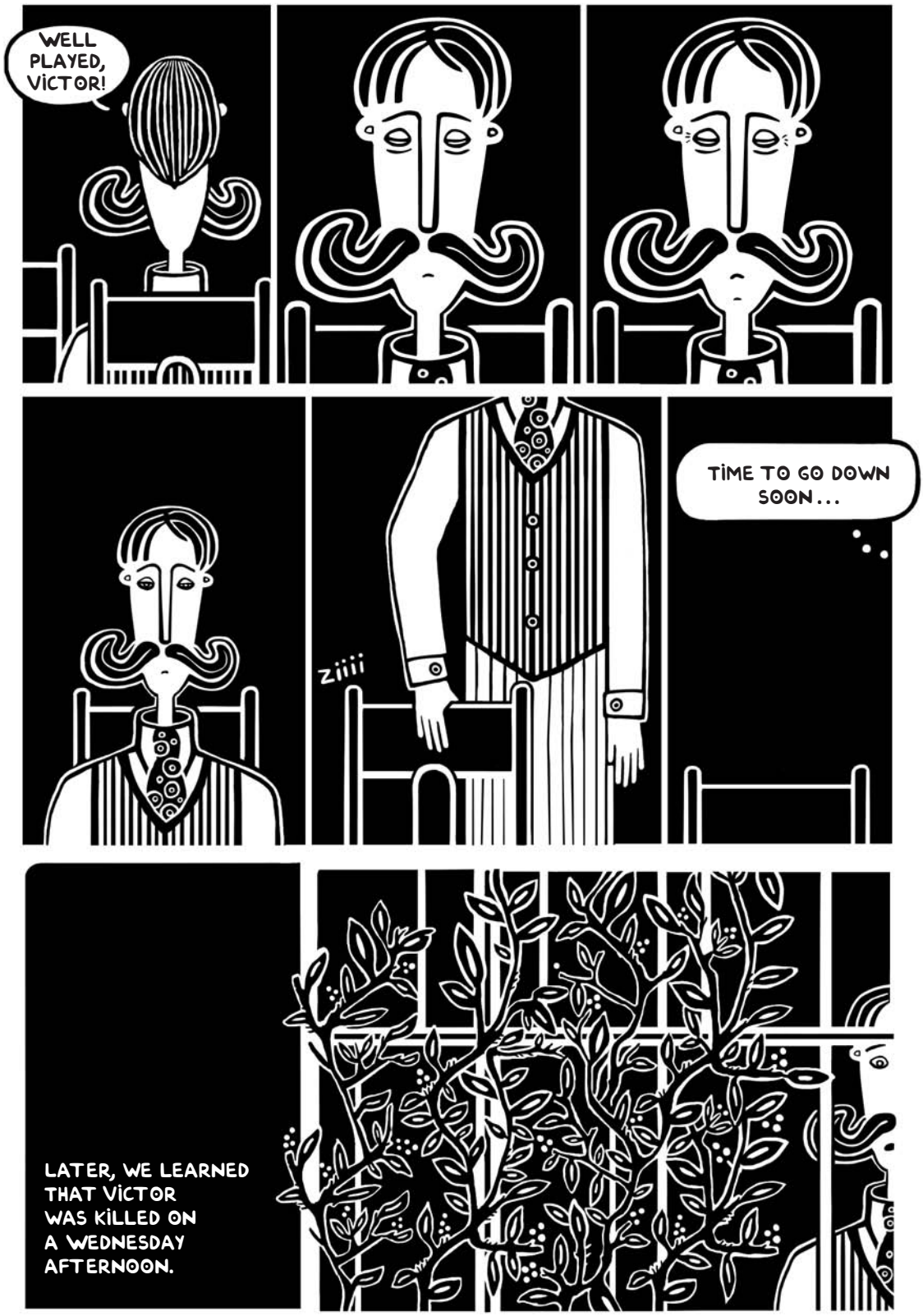
DURING THE WAR, FRUITS AND VEGETABLES WERE IN THEMSELVES A NICE GIFT FOR YOUR NEIGHBOR. AND IF YOU WENT TO THE TROUBLE OF WASHING THEM, WELL, THEY WERE BEYOND VALUE!
CHUCRI WAS THE ONE IN CHARGE OF SUPPLYING US WITH WATER.
HE'D FILL THE TRUNK OF HIS CAR WITH EMPTY JERRY CANS. THEN HE, MY FATHER, AND THE OTHER MEN IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD WOULD GO TO SEE VERA, THE SISTER OF OUR FIFTH-FLOOR NEIGHBOR, MADAME LINDA. VERA LIVED IN A BUILDING WITH AN ARTESIAN WELL.

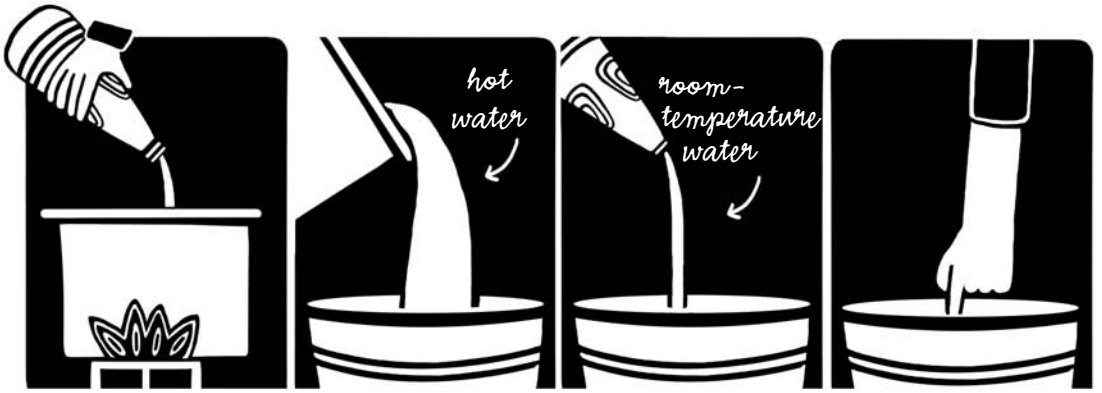
AFTER FILLING THE BLUE JERRY CANS (THE GREEN WERE RESERVED FOR GASOLINE), THEY POURED THE WATER INTO GLASS AND PLASTIC BOTTLES (THE GLASS ONES WERE WHISKEY BOTTLES MY MOTHER HAD KEPT AND WASHED).



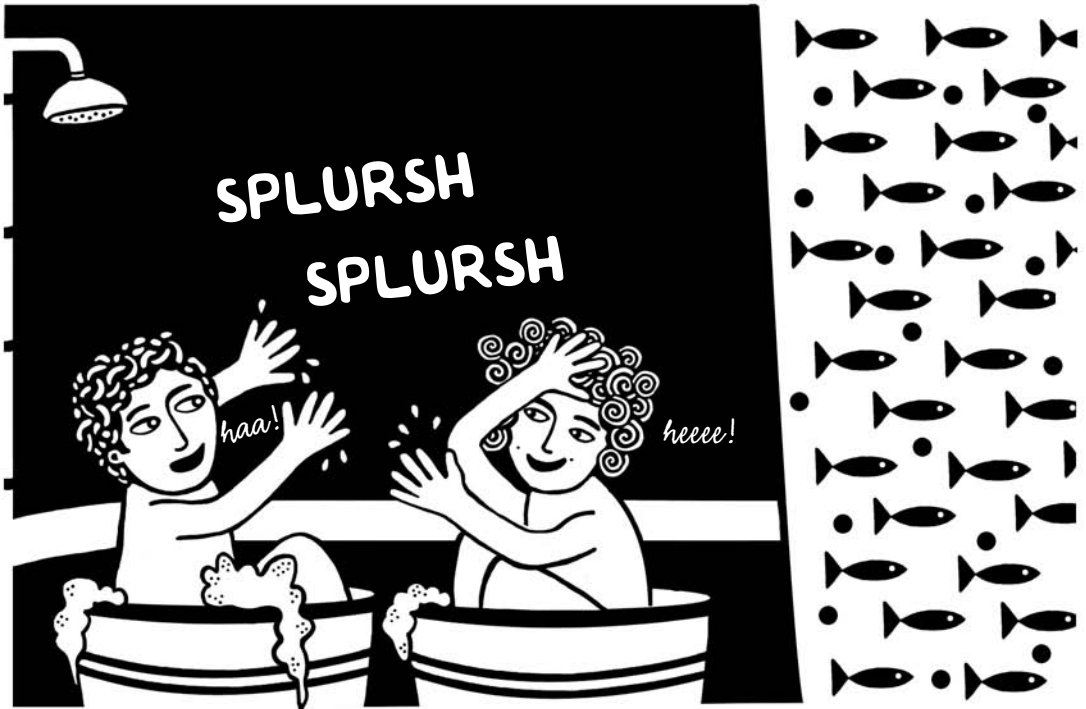

NO ONE HAD RUNNING WATER ANYMORE.
EVERYONE IN THE BUILDING WAS RATIONING WATER SUPPLIES.
AND HOW ARE YOU DOING TODAY, MY DEAR?
AND YOU, MY LOVELY?
OH MY. WHY THE LONG FACE, BEAUTIFUL?
WHAT'S WITH ALL THESE YELLOW LEAVES?
TSK TSK TSK
ERNEST CHALLITA KEPT RIGHT ON WATERING HIS PLANTS EVERY WEDNESDAY.


hm
NOW WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THAT?
WATCH OUT! YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE LAST OF ME!
OH-HO! NOT BAD AT ALL!


WELL PLAYED, VICTOR!
ziiii
TIME TO GO DOWN SOON...
LATER, WE LEARNED THAT VICTOR WAS KILLED ON A WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON.


hot water
room-temperature water

STOP WRIGGLING!
splish splosh


SPLURSH SPLURSH
haa!
heeee!

ALL RIGHT, THAT'S ENOUGH!
SPLURSH
then
SPLOOSH
and
PT PT PT PT PT PT PT
PT PT PT PT PT PT PT
1
2
CLICK!
Legos
SKHT SKHT SKHT
SKHT SKHT SKHT SKHT

THERE'S A LEBANESE EXPRESSION THAT MEANS "A VERY MESSY PLACE." THEY SAY IT'S LIKE "A BATHROOM WITH THE WATER CUT OFF!"

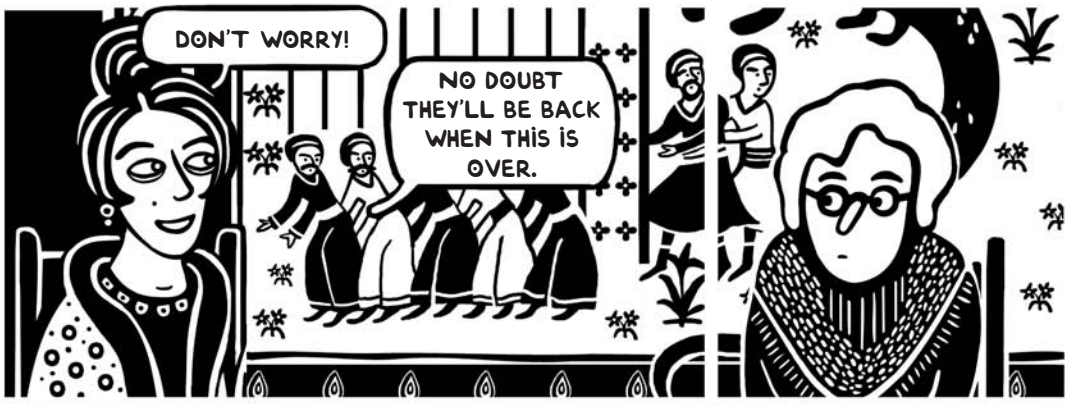
TASTE THIS!
AGED 16 YEARS...
SINGLE MALT!
AAAAH
TO YOUR HEALTH, MR. KHALED!
SMACK!
AH, CONNOISSEURS! WHAT A PLEASURE!
THIS BOTTLE, MY FRIENDS, COMES FROM THE RESTAURANT'S SPECIAL RESERVE!
MONSIEUR KHALED LIVED ON THE FIFTH FLOOR WITH HIS WIFE, MADAME LINDA.
BEFORE THE WAR, MONSIEUR KHALED HAD OPENED VENI VIDI VICI, A RESTAURANT AND NIGHTCLUB THAT SOON BECAME ONE OF THE HOT SPOTS FOR BEIRUT'S RICH KIDS IN THE 1960s.

BEFORE THE WAR, MONSIEUR KHALED AND MADAME LINDA LIVED ON THE TOP FLOOR OF A LUXURY HIGH-RISE BUILDING IN THE MANARA DISTRICT, WEST OF TOWN.
FROM THEIR TERRACE, THEY HAD A VIEW OF THE SEA.
A PITY WE CAN'T MAKE ICE, WHAT WITH ALL THESE BLACKOUTS...
WHEN VENI VIDI VICI WAS DESTROYED IN THE BOMBARDMENTS, MONSIEUR KHALED SAVED THE BEST BOTTLES OF LIQUOR FROM THE RESTAURANT'S CELLAR.
EVER SINCE, EVERY NIGHT, HE TREATED ALL THE NEIGHBORS TO IT.
WHAT??!
THANK GOODNESS WE CAN'T, DEAR!
WHAP
AGED 16 YEARS! ICE WOULD BE SACRILEGE!
THIS IS A NICE LITTLE RITUAL, AT ANY RATE.
AT LEAST THEY CAN'T TAKE THIS AWAY FROM US!

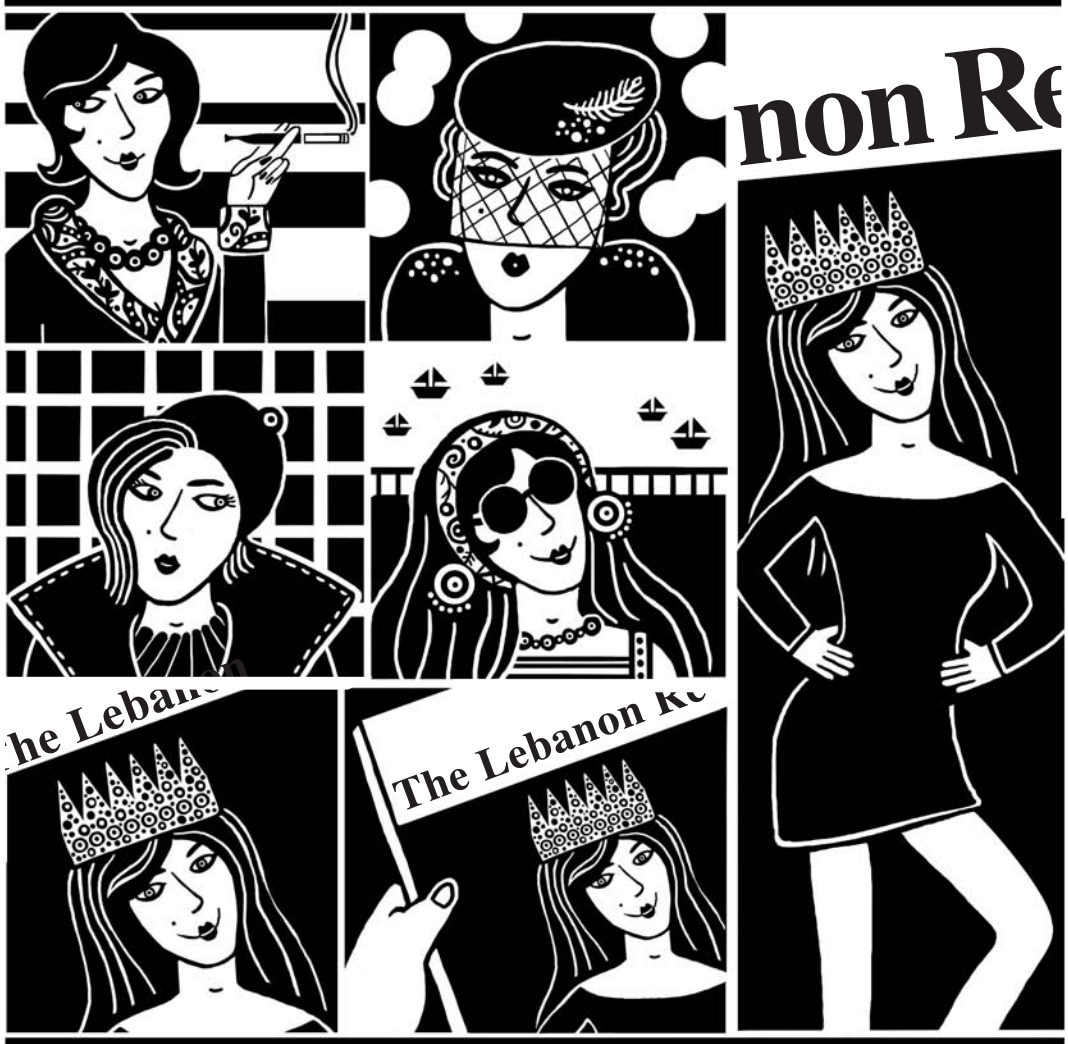
AND WITH THE RESERVES AT OUR PLACE, WE CAN HOLD OUT ANOTHER 10 YEARS!
DURING THE AERIAL BOMBARDMENT OF 1982, MONSIEUR KHALED AND MADAME LINDA WERE FORCED TO FLEE THEIR APARTMENT, WHICH HAD BECOME TOO EASY A TARGET FOR FIGHTER PLANES.
MADAME LINDA WANTED TO REJOIN HER SISTER, WHO LIVED ON THE EAST SIDE, AND SO THEY MOVED INTO OUR BUILDING.
PLEASE, KHALED.
DON'T JOKE ABOUT THAT.
COME, COME!
LET'S ALL ENJOY THIS LITTLE UH... RECESS...
BEFORE THEY START BREAKING THINGS AGAIN...

IF YOU WANT TO BUY A GOOD BOTTLE OF WHISKEY FOR CHEAP ONE DAY, I KNOW WHERE TO GET ONE!
REALLY?
I SAW THESE PEOPLE SELLING THEM IN THE STREET YESTERDAY, NOT FAR FROM ABU JAMIL STATION.
YOU THINK IT'S DRINKABLE?
FOR SURE!
SEEMS THEY STOLE THESE CASES OF WHISKEY FROM CONTAINERS AT THE PORT.
THERE WERE MAJOR LABELS!
INTERESTING...
hmm

YOU SEEM PREOCCUPIED, ANHALA.
YES, MADAME LINDA.
I'M A BIT WORRIED ABOUT FARAH AND RAMZI.
THEY MUST STILL BE IN THE OFFICE, RIGHT?
YES, YES, NO DOUBT.
DO YOU WANT ME TO ASK CHUCRI TO CALL THEM?
NO, NO, MADAME LINDA.



MADAME LINDA HAD BEEN A VERY BEAUTIFUL WOMAN.



SHE'D EVEN BEEN MISS LEBANON BACK IN THE 1960s!

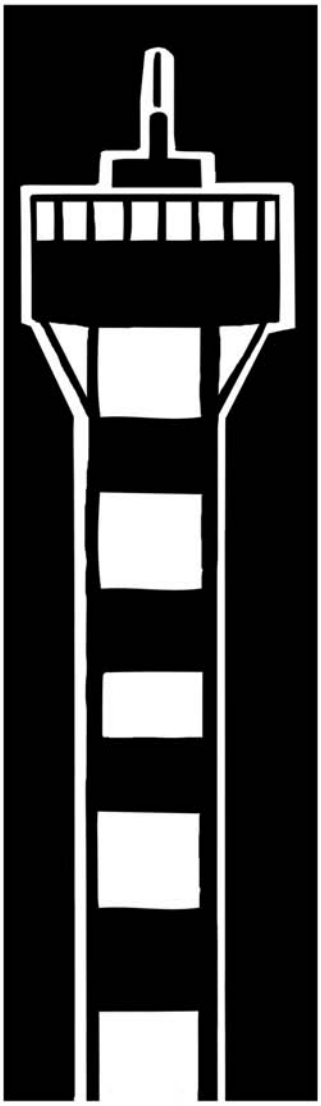
THE DAY AFTER SHE WON THE TITLE, THE PHOTO OF HER IN A MINISKIRT ON THE COVER OF THE *LEBANON REVIEW* WAS HER FATHER'S MISERY AND HER MOTHER'S JOY...

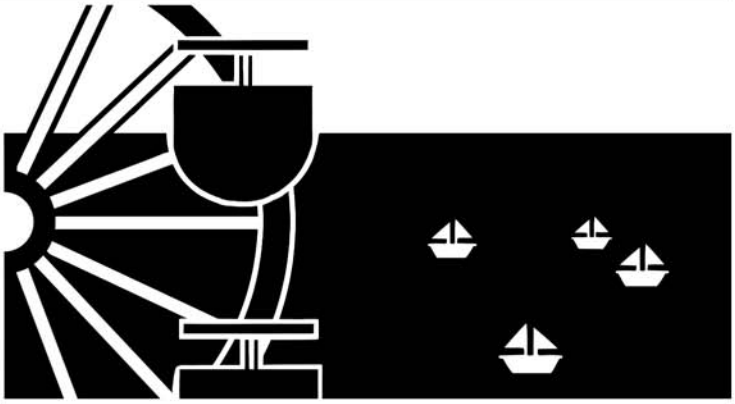
AND THEIR NEIGHBORS' DELIGHT.

RESTAURANT
veni vidi vici
cha cha
cha cha
cha cha
cha cha
cha cha
cha cha
cha cha
cha cha
cha cha
cha cha
cha cha
cha cha
ONE NIGHT, MADAME LINDA CAME TO DINE AT VENI VIDI VICI...
cha cha
cha cha
BOOM
BOOM

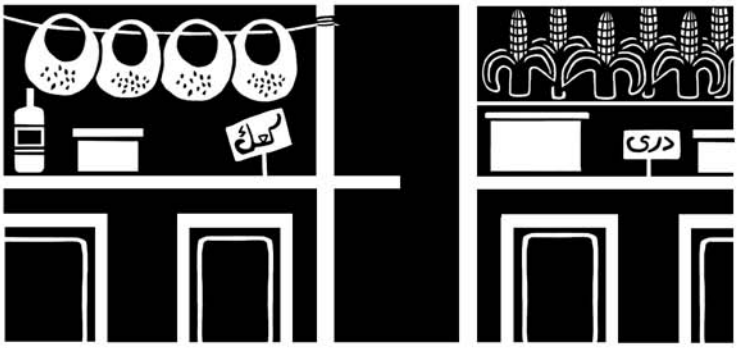
KHALED SAİD HE WAS BORN İN TEXAS.
BUT FOR LİNDA'S BEAUTİFUL EYES, HE AGREED TO LİVE HERE.

HE TOLD HER THAT OVER THERE, THEY HAD A VERY BEAUTİFUL LİGHTHOUSE,

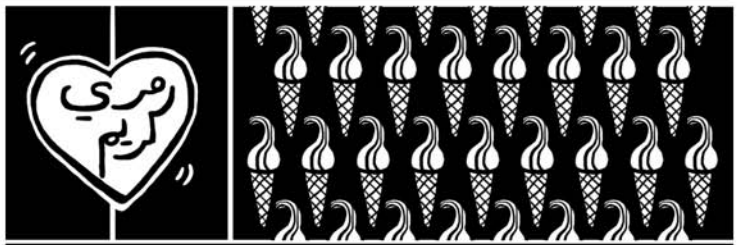




A FERRİS WHEEL, A CLİFF ROAD ALONG THE SEA, RESTAURANTS, STORES ALL LİT UP,



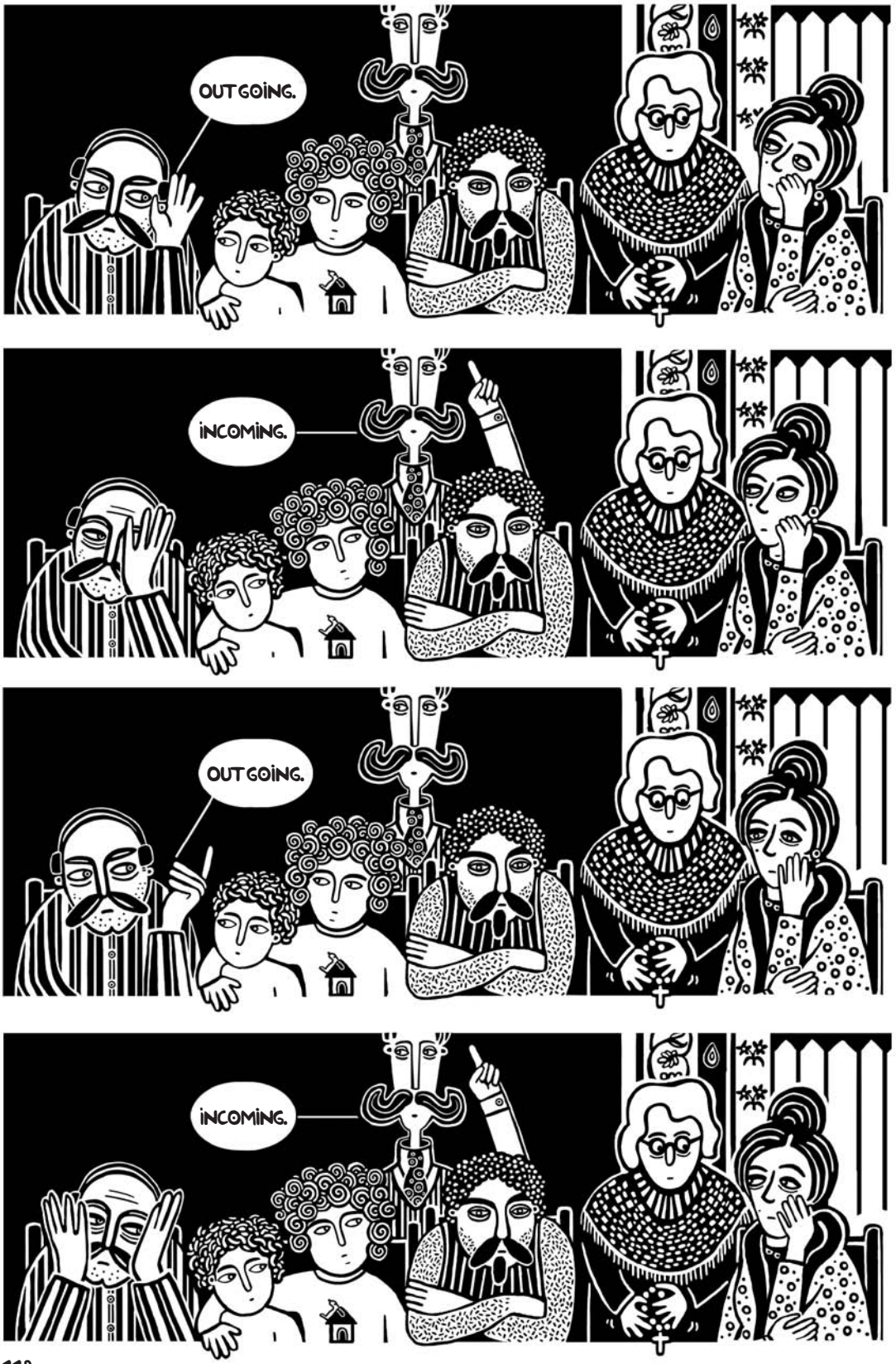
STREET MERCHANTS, SİDEWALK CAFÉS

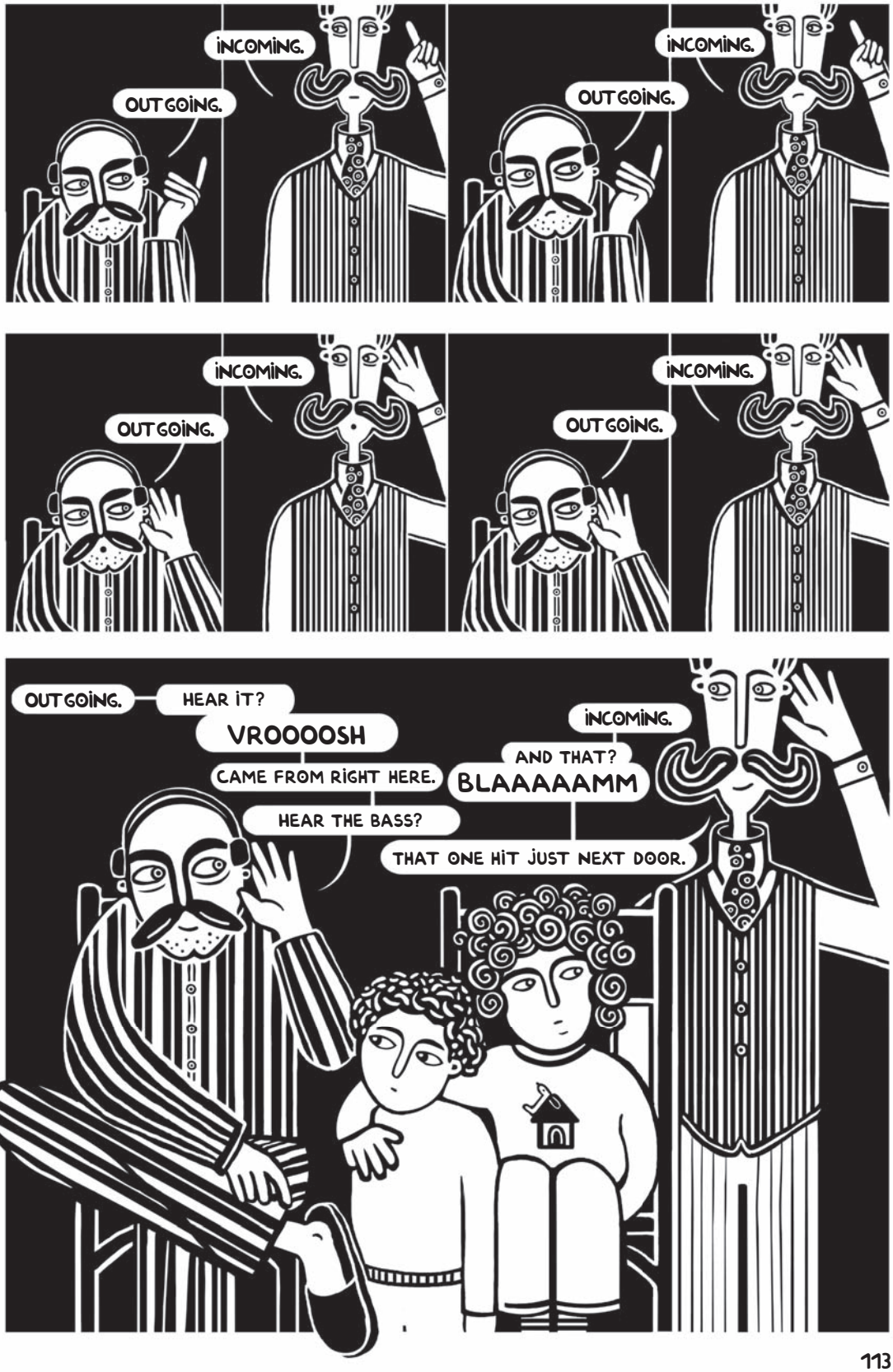


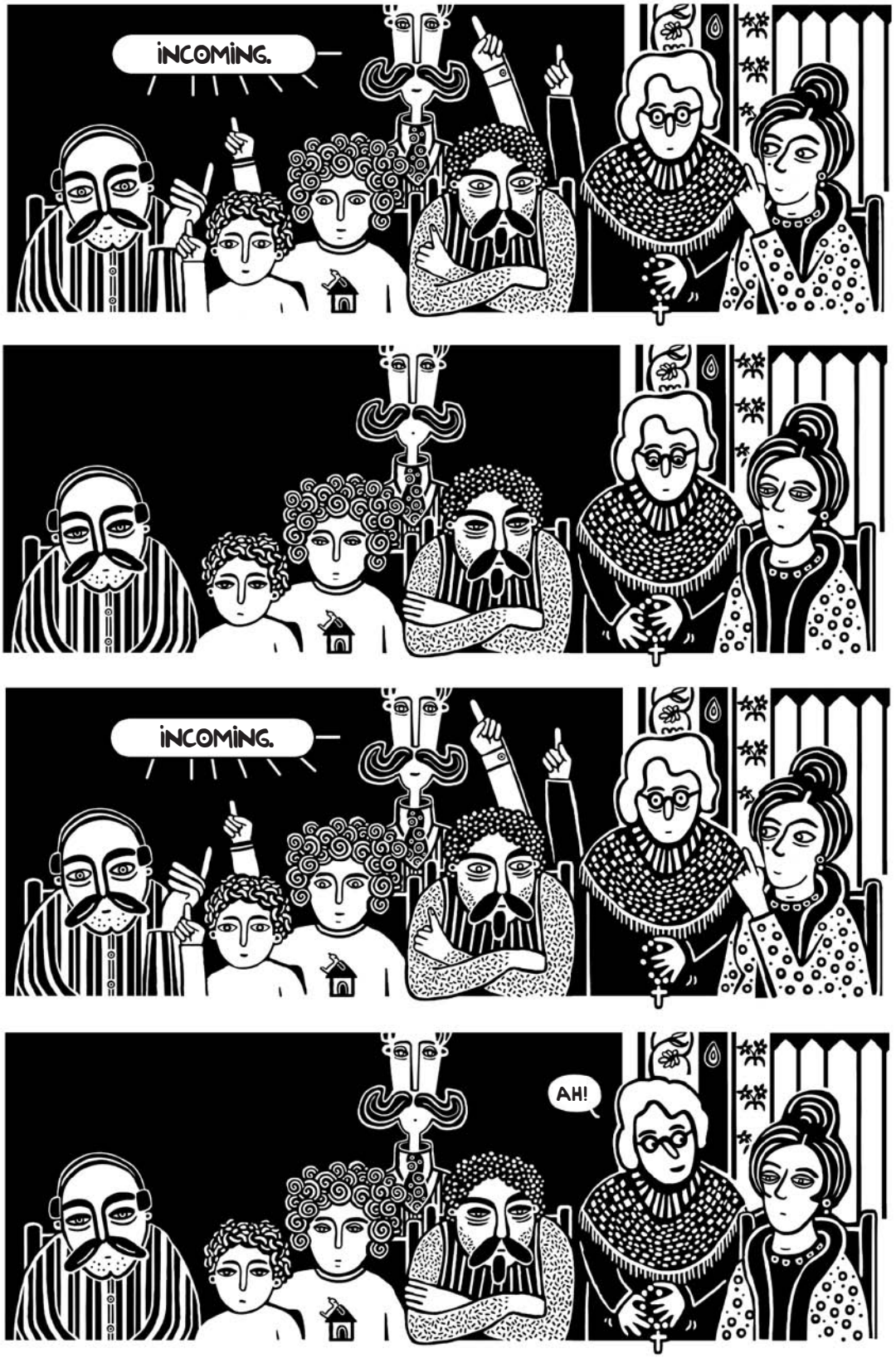
AND, ABOVE ALL, THE BEST "MERRY CREAMS" İN THE WORLD.

...AND THE MEDITERRANEAN AS FAR AS THE EYE COULD SEE!
TEXAS, THE FARTHEST PLACE KHALED COULD THINK OF, WAS HOW HE REFERRED TO THE WEST BEIRUT DISTRICT WHERE HE'D LIVED, WHICH THE WAR HAD DRIVEN HIM FROM.
ahhh
HMM... SOUNDS LIKE IT'S STARTING AGAIN.
AKH
HMMM

AKH! DO YOU HEAR THAT? THAT CAME FROM RIGHT NEAR HERE.
AND THAT ONE... HEAR IT? IT'S COMING!
sigh
AND THAT? ANOTHER ONE FROM HERE.
AKH
zzzzz

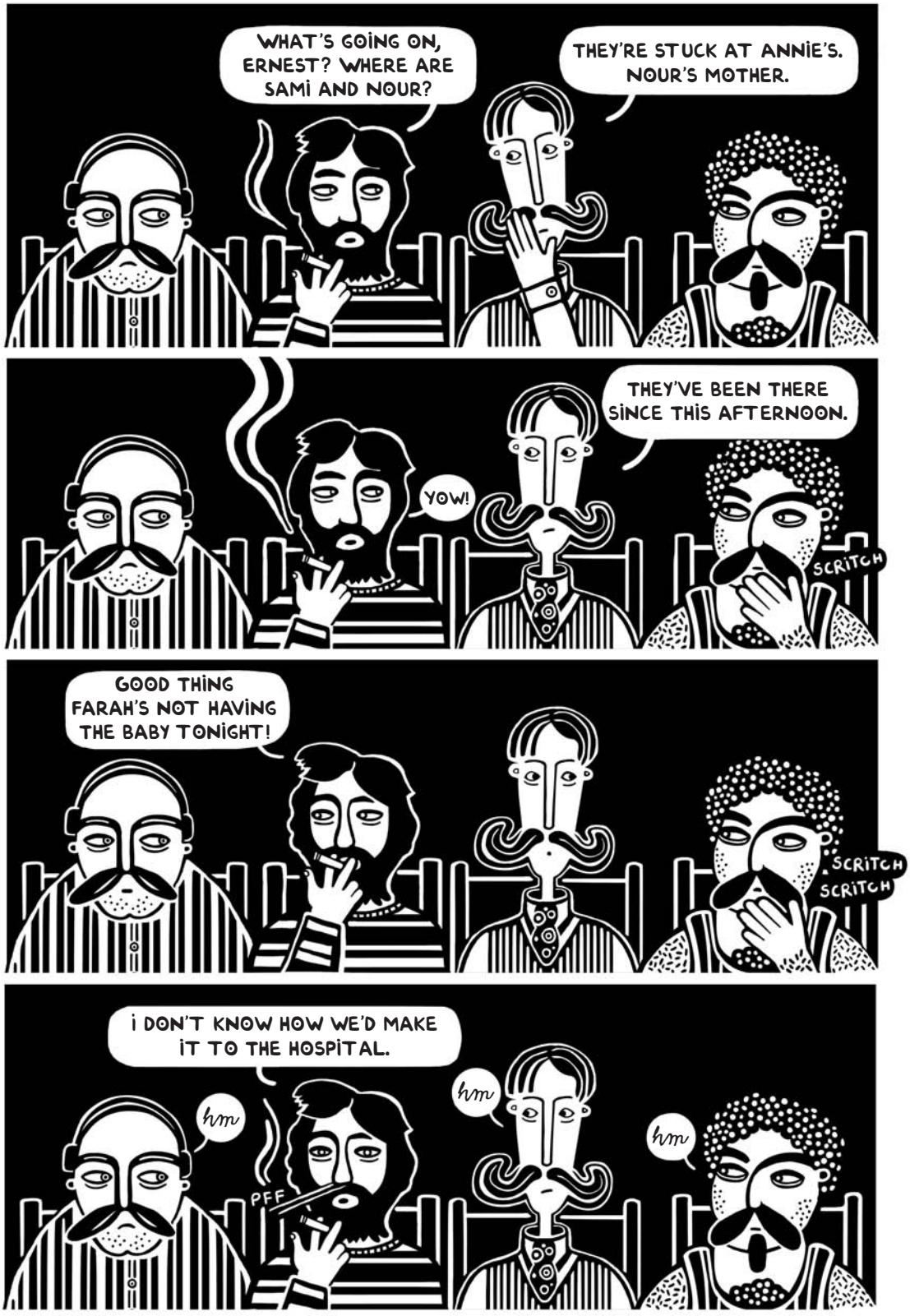

OUTGOING.
INCOMING.
OUTGOING.
INCOMING.

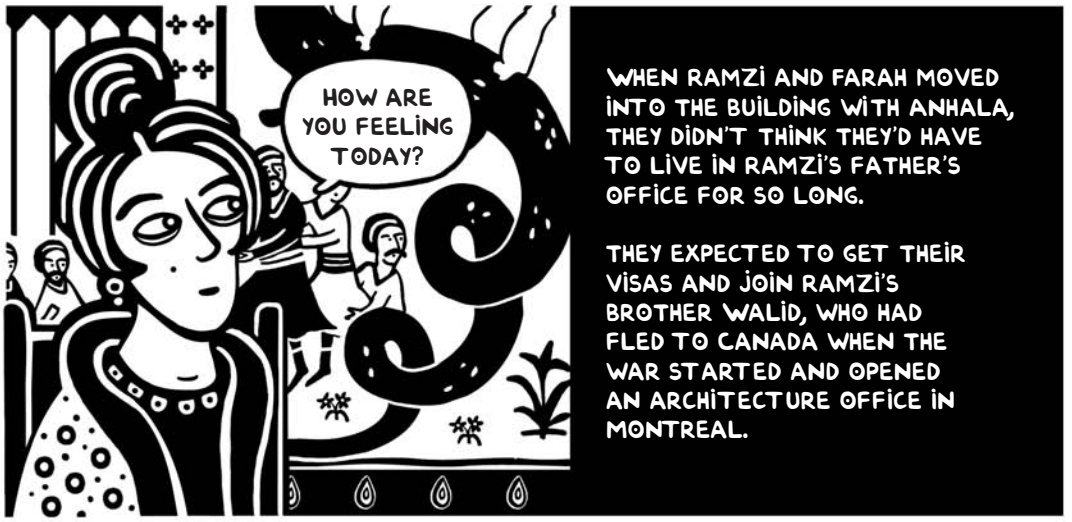

INCOMING.
OUTGOING.
INCOMING.
OUTGOING.
INCOMING.
OUTGOING.
INCOMING.
OUTGOING.
OUTGOING.
HEAR IT?
VROOOOSH
CAME FROM RIGHT HERE.
HEAR THE BASS?
INCOMING.
AND THAT?
BLAAAAAMM
THAT ONE HIT JUST NEXT DOOR.


INCOMING.
INCOMING.
AH!

AT LAST! YOU'RE BACK!
AHHHH!
MY DEAR!
ANHALA!
RAMZİ!
İ WAS STARTİNG TO WORRY!
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE. YOU KNEW WE WERE İN THE OFFİCE!
COME İN! COME SİT DOWN!
THEY WERE JUST ONE FLOOR UP, AFTER ALL.

AH! THE ARCHITECT!
EVERYONE AROUND HERE CALLED RAMZI "THE ARCHITECT," EVEN THOUGH HE NEVER ACTUALLY HAD THE CHANCE TO PRACTICE HIS CAREER.
HEY, CHUCRI!
EVENING, EVERYONE!
HOW'S IT GOING?
HAVE YOU HEARD THE NEWS?
YES.
HI, KIDS!
EVERYTHING GOOD?
HI, RAMZI.
WE'RE WAITING FOR POP AND MOM.
ERNEST SAID THEY WOULDN'T BE LONG.

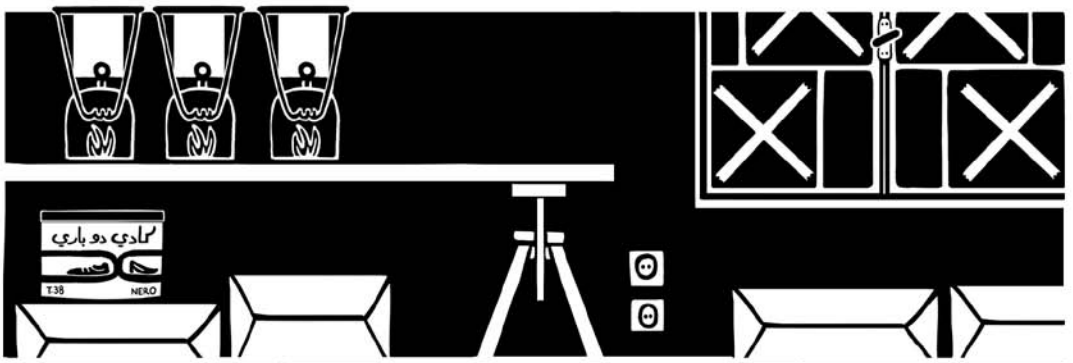

WHAT'S GOING ON, ERNEST? WHERE ARE SAMI AND NOUR?
THEY'RE STUCK AT ANNIE'S. NOUR'S MOTHER.
THEY'VE BEEN THERE SINCE THIS AFTERNOON.
YOW!
SCRITCH
GOOD THING FARAH'S NOT HAVING THE BABY TONIGHT!
SCRITCH SCRITCH
I DON'T KNOW HOW WE'D MAKE IT TO THE HOSPITAL.
hm
PFF
hm
hm


HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?
WHEN RAMZI AND FARAH MOVED INTO THE BUILDING WITH ANHALA, THEY DIDN'T THINK THEY'D HAVE TO LIVE IN RAMZI'S FATHER'S OFFICE FOR SO LONG.
THEY EXPECTED TO GET THEIR VISAS AND JOIN RAMZI'S BROTHER WALID, WHO HAD FLED TO CANADA WHEN THE WAR STARTED AND OPENED AN ARCHITECTURE OFFICE IN MONTREAL.

MUCH BETTER, THANKS! THIS MORNING I FELT HIM MOVE IN MY BELLY FOR THE FIRST TIME!
AH, MY DEAR!

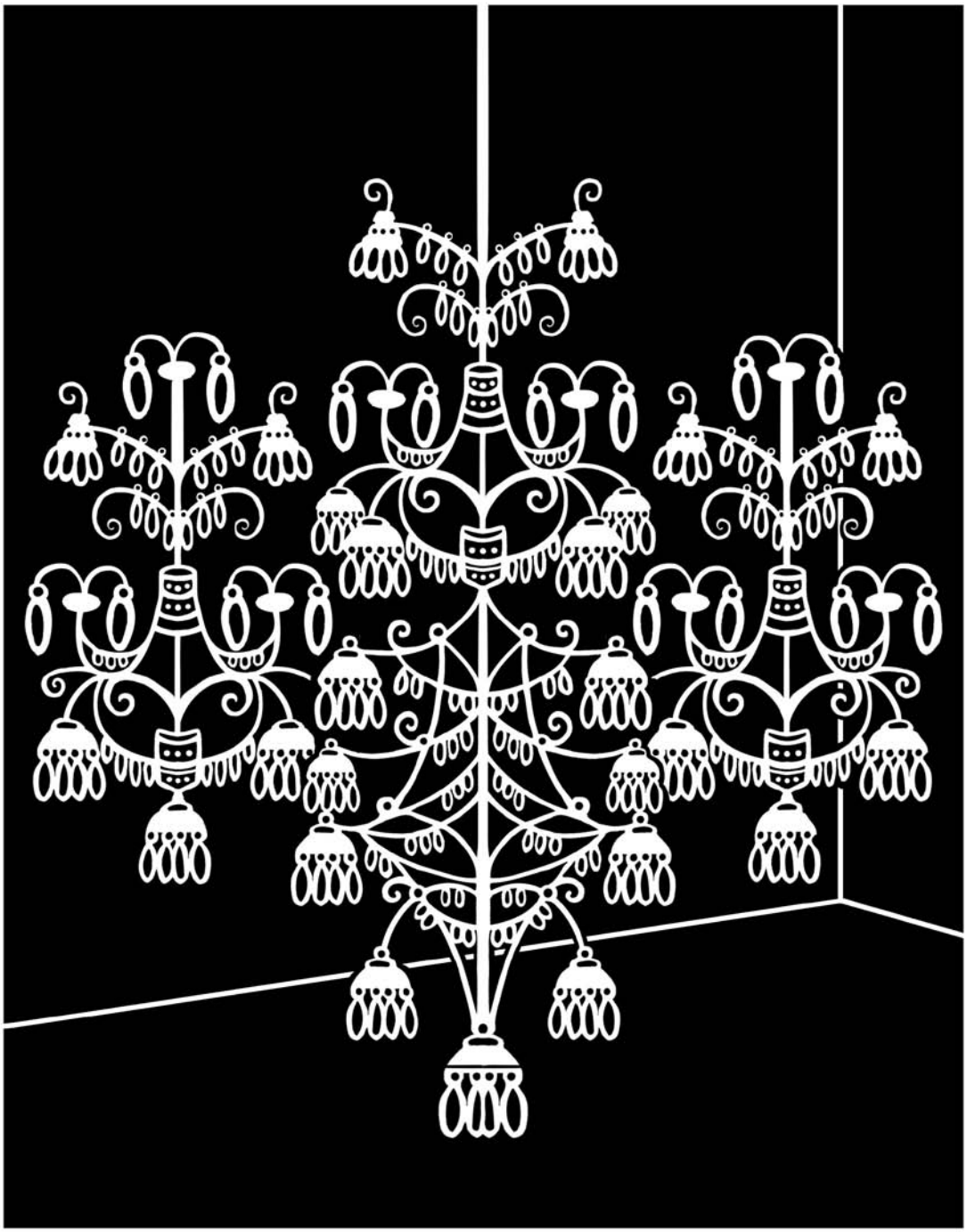
I'D NEVER HAVE THOUGHT I'D HAVE MY FIRST CHILD IN AN OFFICE FULL OF SUITCASES...
THERE, THERE.
FARAH ALWAYS WORE A LITTLE BAG ON HER SHOULDER WITH BOTH THEIR PASSPORTS AND READY CASH.

DON'T WORRY.
WHEN THE TIME COMES, I'LL TAKE YOU TO THE HOSPITAL!
DON'T BE DISCOURAGED.
RIGHT. IT WILL ALL TURN OUT FINE.
BESIDES, YOU MIGHT BE GONE BEFORE THEN.
RATHER, LET'S SAY YOUR SON MIGHT HAVE A CHANCE AT DUAL CITIZENSHIP!
NOW THAT'S A GUARANTEE OF SAFETY!
USUALLY, WHEN FARAH AND RAMZI SHOWED UP IN THE FOYER, IT MEANT THAT THE BOMBARDMENT WAS ABOUT TO GET WORSE.



THE OFFICE, WHICH THEY'D TURNED INTO A BEDROOM, OVERLOOKED A VACANT LOT WHERE A CANNON HAD BEEN SET UP.

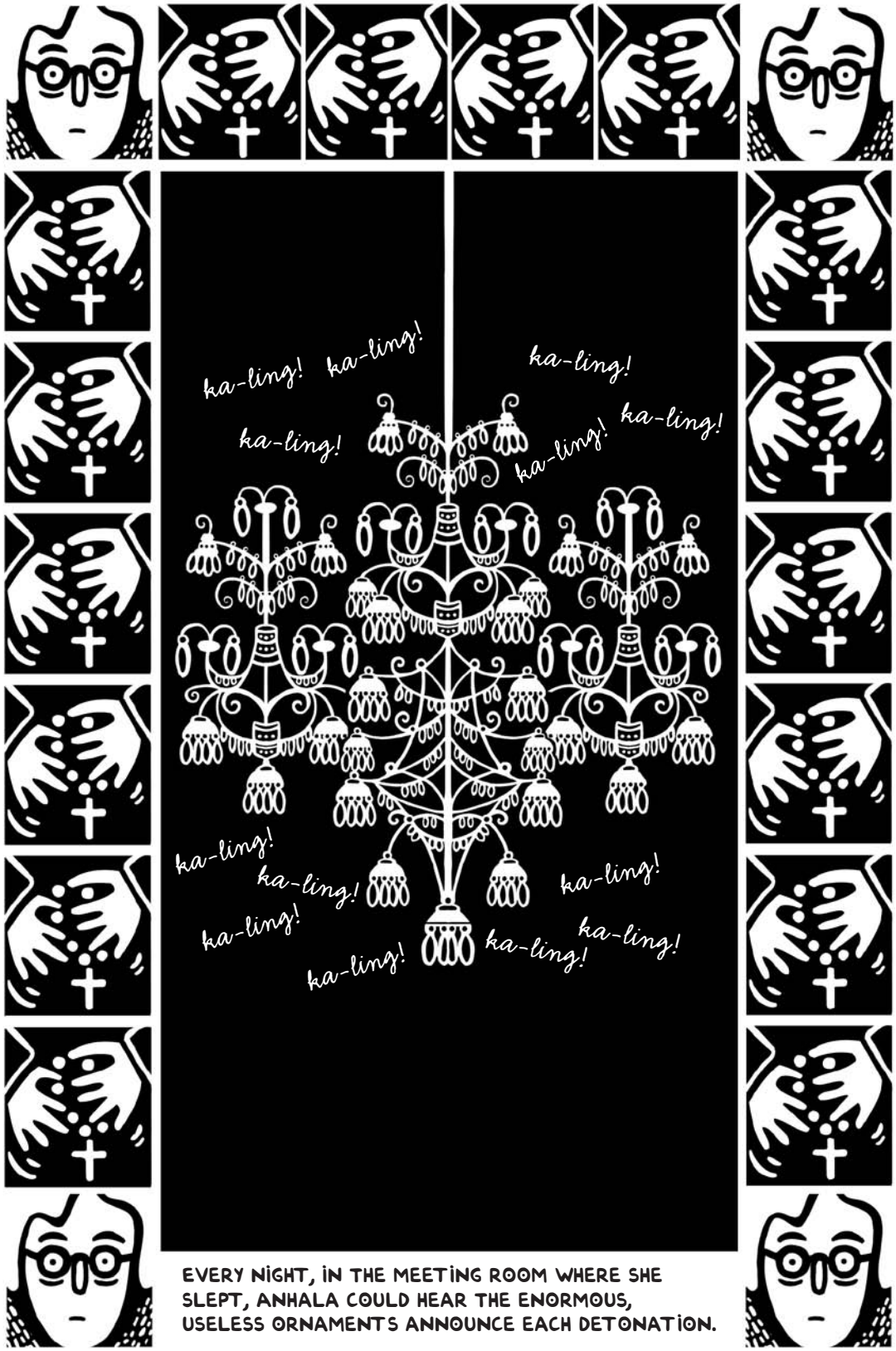
THROUGH THE OFFICE WALL, RAMZI COULD HEAR THE GUNNERS BEING GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS. HE WAS ALWAYS THE FIRST TO KNOW WHEN THINGS WERE ABOUT TO BECOME UNBEARABLE.



WHERE ANHALA SLEPT, A CRYSTAL CHANDELIER THAT BELONGED TO RAMZI'S FATHER'S CLIENTS HUNG ALMOST TO THE FLOOR.

ALTHOUGH ALL THE BUILDING'S WINDOWS HAD LONG SINCE BURST INTO PIECES, THE CHANDELIER—USELESS BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ELECTRICITY—HAD REMAINED INTACT.

above?
E RED SEA SHARKS HERGÉ
ROAD J.KEROUAC
below?
E RED SEA SHARKS HERGÉ
ROAD J.KEROUAC
above?
passports + ready cash
E RED SEA SHARKS HERGÉ
ROAD J.KEROUAC
below?
YOU ASLEEP?
E RED SEA SHARKS HERGÉ
ROAD J.KEROUAC



EVERY NIGHT, IN THE MEETING ROOM WHERE SHE SLEPT, ANHALA COULD HEAR THE ENORMOUS, USELESS ORNAMENTS ANNOUNCE EACH DETONATION.

I'VE THOUGHT IT OVER. THIS CAN'T GO ON.
WHAT CAN'T?
ABDALLAH?
YES, RAMZI INSISTS... IT'S HIS FATHER'S FIRST NAME.
I'M GOING TO FIND SAMI AND NOUR.
TSSSSSK...
I LIKE ABDALLAH A LOT!
ME TOO! BUT WHAT IF HE GROWS UP IN CANADA?
WHY TSSSSSK?
hm
HMM. THAT'D BE HARD FOR HIM.
WE'D HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER NAME. LIKE KAMIL.
VERY HEROIC, MY LAD...
KAMIL'S NICE. IT SOUNDS LIKE CAMILLE!

I'm a princess
and I'm goldorak
HMMMMM
HMMMMM
I've got a huge furry dragon
and I've got a sword and six wings
HMMMMM
HMMMMM
maybe he even breathes fire
giant wings to fly with
WHAAAT?
E-M-E-R-G-E! EMERGE!
ARGH
DOUBLE WORD SCORE!
HAH!

VERY HEROIC BUT TOO RISKY.
DON'T YOU ROLL YOUR EYES AT ME!
BUT YOU KNOW I KNOW THE ROADS!
MAYBE.
BUT TONIGHT IS DIFFERENT.

IF HE LIVES ABROAD, IT MIGHT BE EASIER ON HIM IF HIS NAME SOUNDS LIKE A WESTERN ONE...
YES.
BUT IN RAMZI'S FAMILY, THE ELDEST SONS HAVE ALL BEEN NAMED ABDALLAH AND WALID FOR AT LEAST SIX GENERATIONS!
AND SINCE RAMZI'S OLDER BROTHER, WALID, HAD A DAUGHTER LAST YEAR, I THINK IT'D MAKE THE WHOLE FAMILY HAPPY IF WE NAMED OUR SON ABDALLAH...
OF COURSE!

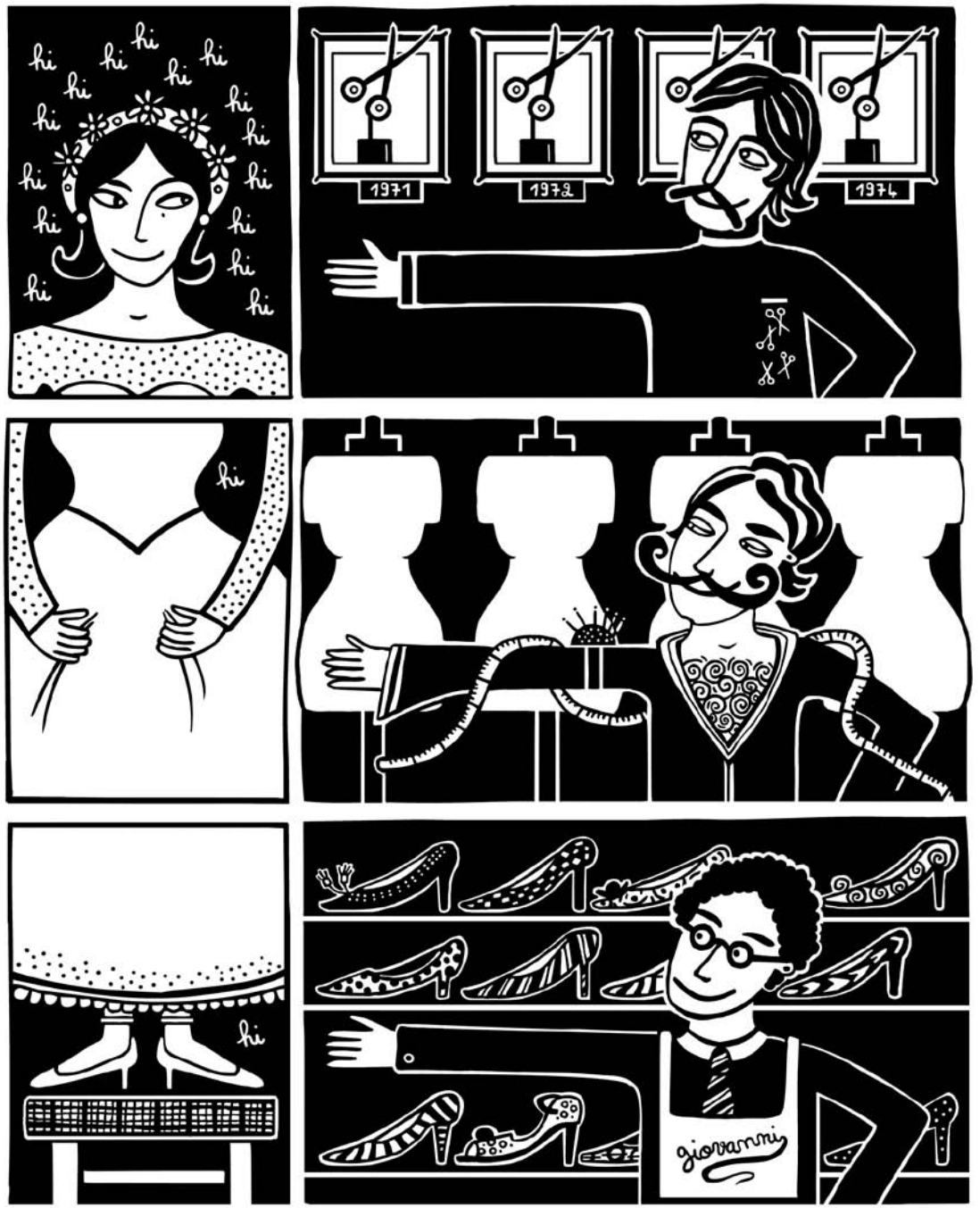
WHAT'S DIFFERENT TONIGHT, CHUCRI?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING THERE?
AREN'T YOU SLEEPY?
WANT TO PLAY CARDS?
FT.
NO.
WE COULD PLAY THE GAME I TAUGHT YOU THE OTHER DAY.
THE ONE WHERE JACKS TAKE ALL THE OTHER CARDS!
WHAT WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
NOTHING! NOTHING!
ERNEST WAS TELLING ME A STORY, THAT'S ALL.
DON'T GIVE IT ANOTHER THOUGHT.

I'D LOVE TO SEE YOUR WEDDING PHOTOS SOMEDAY!
THEY'RE IN MY PURSE. WE CAN LOOK AT THEM RIGHT NOW!
WITH PLEASURE!
SWEETHEART, DO YOU WANT TO LOOK AT THE PHOTOS WITH MADAME LINDA AND ME?
UH-HUH!
AREN'T YOU SLEEPY?
NUH-UH!

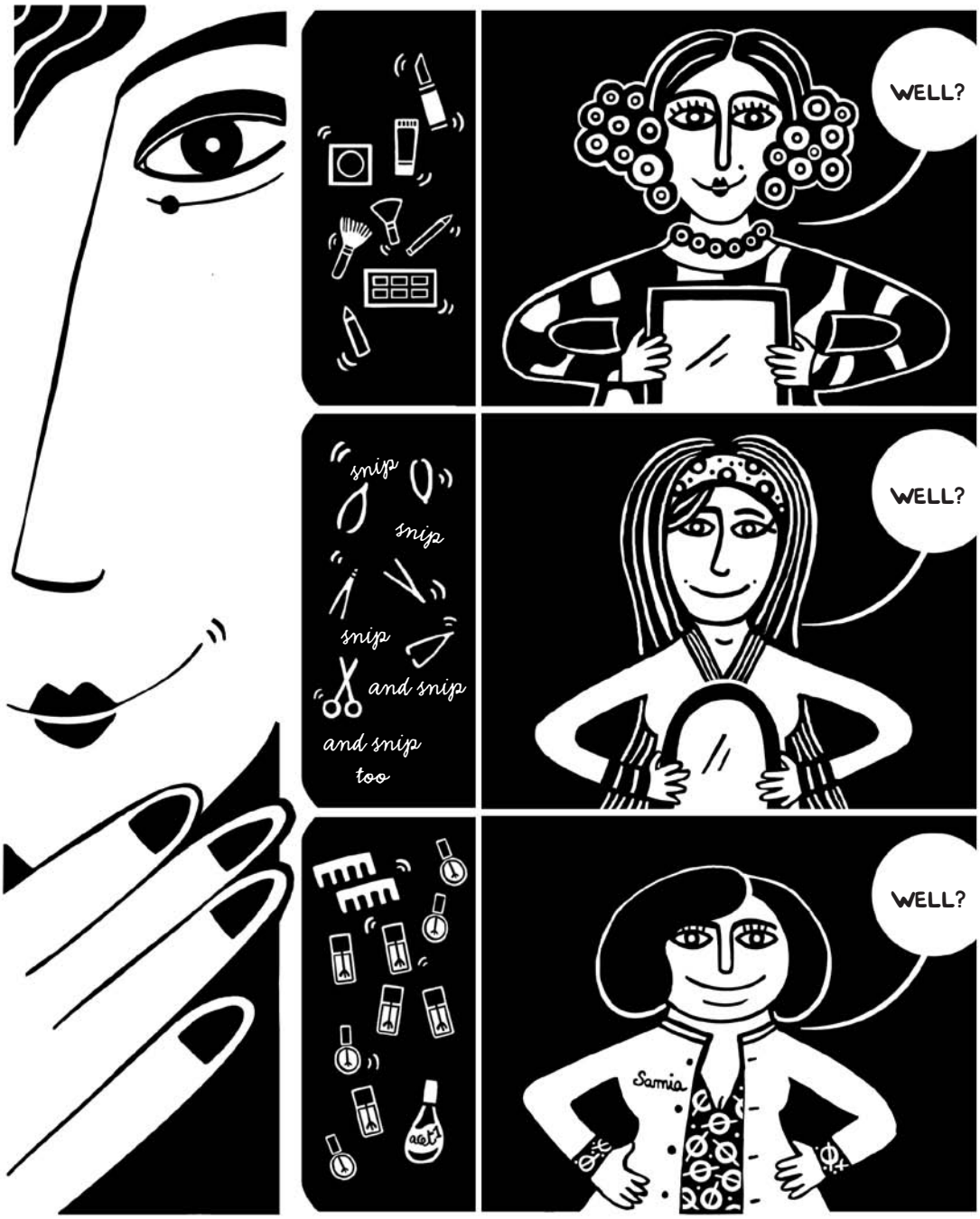
WIIIILILILILILILI
WOOOOOOW!
LOOK AT THAT CAKE!
MAR-VE-LOUS!
YOUR DRESS IS SO PRETTY!
SEE HOW NICE RAMZI'S HAIRCUT IS?
ARE THOSE YOUR PARENTS NEXT TO YOU?

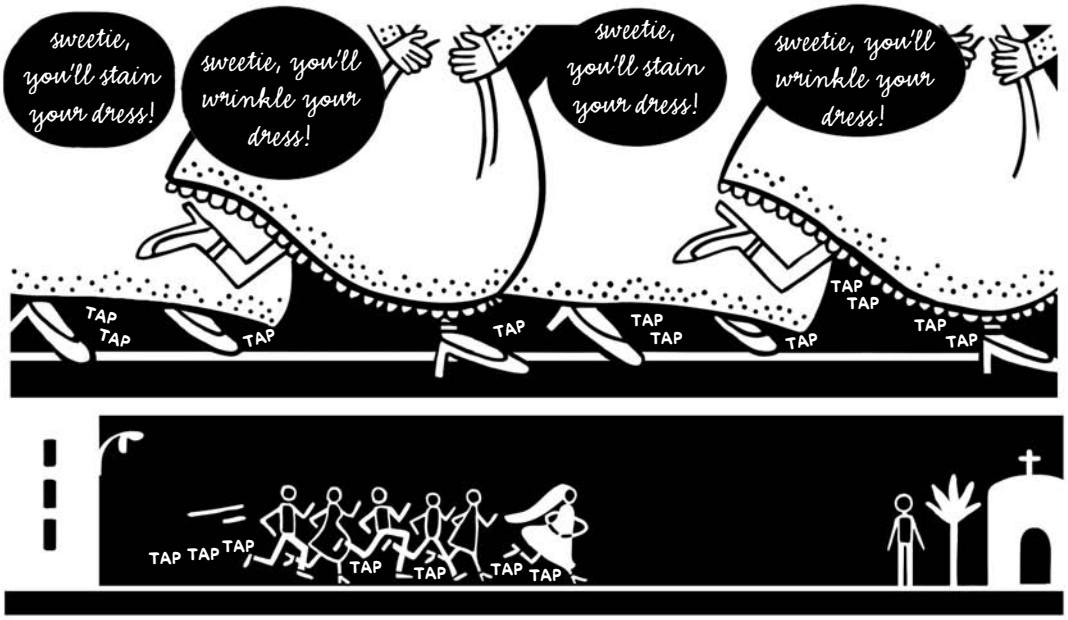
"ANHALA HAD PREPARED A BUFFET TO MATCH HER AFFECTION!
SINCE SUPERMARKETS WEREN'T YET EQUIPPED WITH SUFFICIENTLY POWERFUL GENERATORS BACK THEN, THEY WOULD PUT ALL THE PRODUCTS THEY COULDN'T FIT IN THEIR FREEZERS ON SALE.
A FEAST LIKE THAT WAS UNBELIEVABLE... AND IN THE MIDDLE OF WARTIME!"

"MAMA INSISTED WE HAVE MY DRESS MADE BY THE EMINENT DESIGNER COUSSA, WHO'D DESIGNED HER OWN WEDDING DRESS. BACK THEN IT WAS HIM, THAT IS. NOW HIS SON HAD TAKEN OVER THE STUDIO.
NEXT, JEAN, THE SHOEMAKER ON GHANDOUR EL-SAAD STREET, DESIGNED WHITE SHOES WITH BUTTON STRAPS THAT MATCHED MY DRESS. HE STUDIED IN ITALY, YOU KNOW! ON THE WEDDING DAY, FOUAD, THE STYLIST AT THE MA BELLE SALON, CAME TO THE HOUSE TO DO MY HAIR.
I WAS TREATED LIKE A REAL PRINCESS!"



"MAMA ABSOLUTELY INSISTED ON ACTING AS IF EVERYTHING WERE NORMAL—WHEN SHE WAS THE ONE WHO'D RALLIED EVERYONE!
JAMAL, THE BEAUTICIAN AT MA BELLE, CAME TO DO MY MAKEUP. HIS YOUNGER SISTER PATRICIA CAME WITH HIM, WITH HER TWEEZER KIT AND OTHER INSTRUMENTS OF TORTURE...
AND SAMIA, WHO'D TAKEN CARE OF MAMA'S NAILS FOREVER, GAVE ME A MEMORABLE MANICURE AND PEDICURE, IN MY ROOM AT MY PARENTS' HOUSE!"

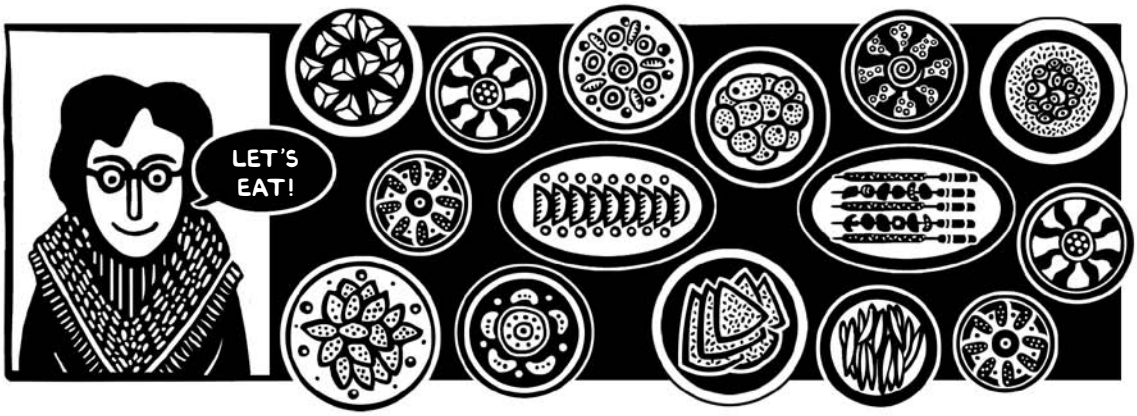



sweetie, you'll stain your dress!
sweetie, you'll wrinkle your dress!
sweetie, you'll stain your dress!
sweetie, you'll wrinkle your dress!
TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP

"I DON'T REMEMBER THE RELIGIOUS CEREMONY VERY WELL ANYMORE.
SINCE RAMZI WAS A MARONITE, WE WERE MARRIED ACCORDING TO THE MARONITE RITE. QUITE PRACTICAL, IN THE END!
FIRST OF ALL: BECAUSE THERE WAS A MARONITE CHURCH RIGHT ACROSS FROM MY PARENTS' HOUSE.
NEXT: BECAUSE THE CEREMONY WAS SHORTER THAN THE ORTHODOX ONE.
IT REASSURED ALL THE GUESTS TO KNOW WE WOULDN'T SPEND MUCH TIME OUTSIDE THE HOUSE!

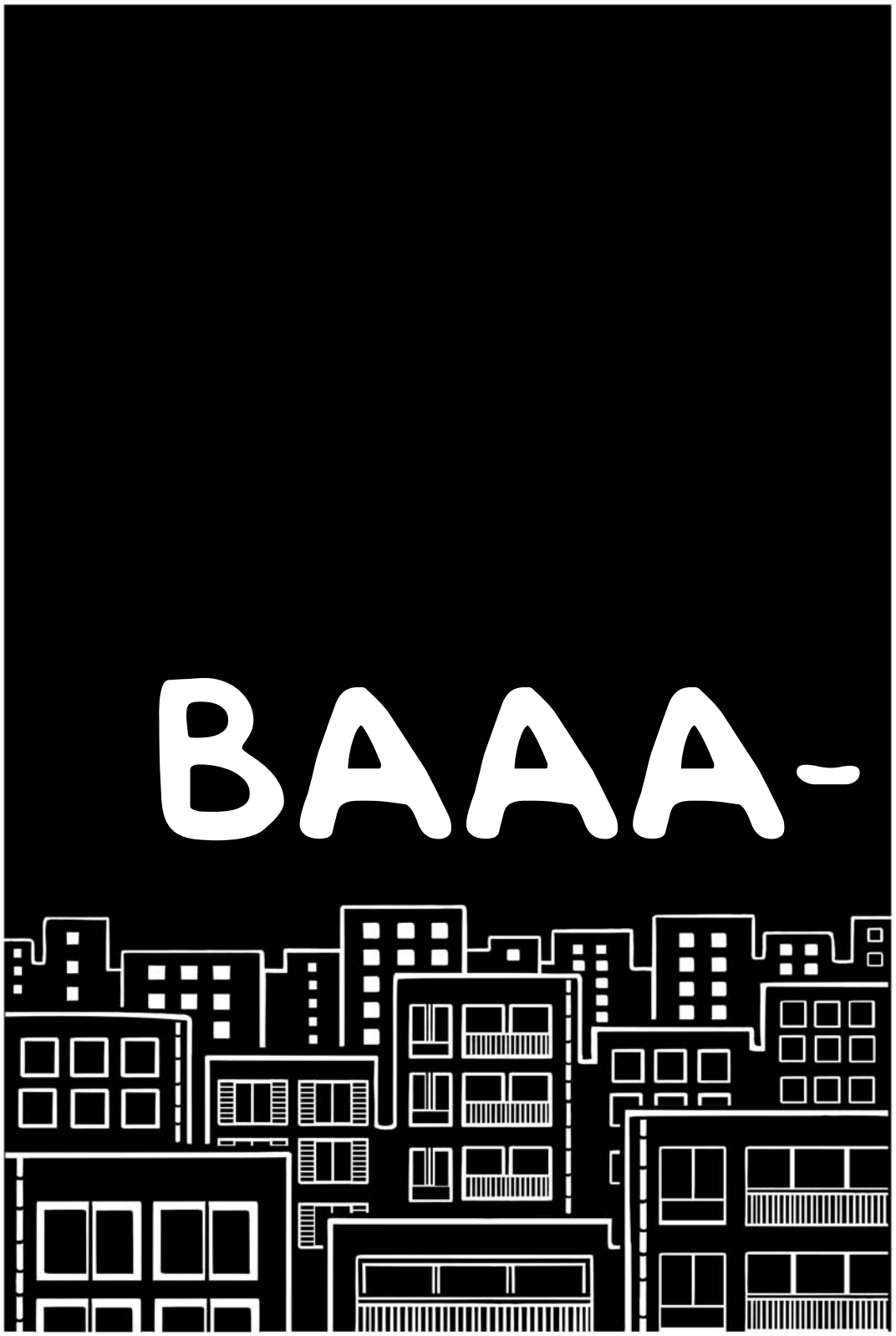
I REMEMBER THAT TO AVOID THE SNIPER, WE HAD TO RUN FROM MY PARENTS' HOUSE TO THE CHURCH AND THEN FROM THE CHURCH BACK TO MY PARENTS.

MAMA WAS SO STRESSED OUT BY THE CROSSING BACK AND FORTH THAT SHE STARTED FIXATING ON MY DRESS!"

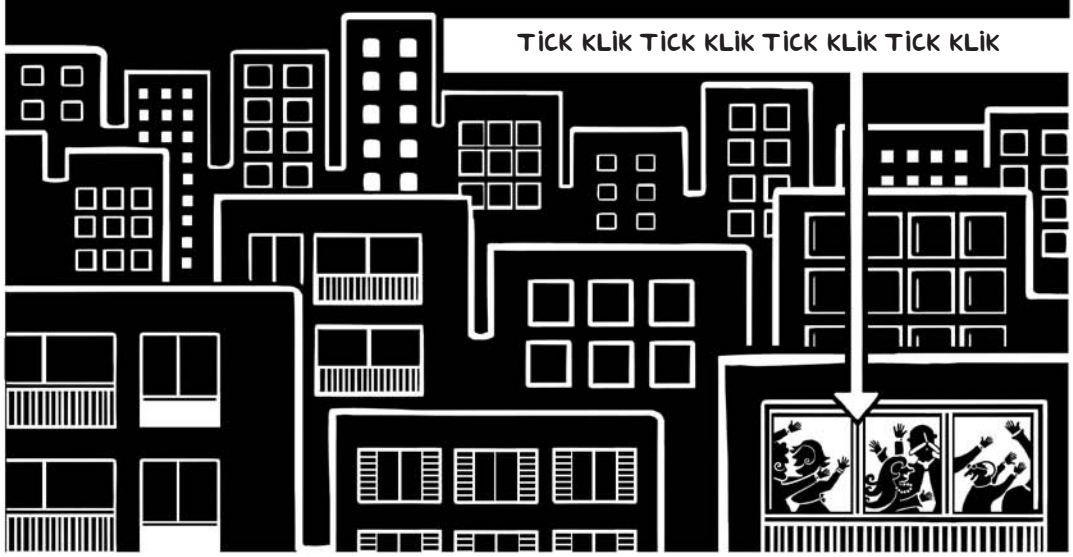


"EVERYONE WAS MORE RELAXED WHEN WE GOT TO THE HOUSE. ANHALA CALLED US TO THE TABLE, MY FATHER UNCORKED THE CHAMPAGNE, AND SOMEONE PUT ON AN ENRICO MACIAS RECORD."

"WHEN I THINK BACK... I REALIZE WE NEVER SUSPECTED A THING."


BAAA-

RROOM



RIIIINNG
HELLO?
YES?
GOOD EVENING, MADAME ANNIE!
MADAME ANNIE?!

YES, I CAN HEAR YOU!
CHILDREN! IT'S YOUR GRANDMOTHER!
YES.
CAN WE TALK TO POP AND MOM?
WAIT, I CAN'T HEAR A THING ANYMORE.
YES.

YES.
YES, YES, I'M HERE.
STOP PULLING LIKE THAT, YOU'RE HURTING ME!
YES.
YES.
WHAT'S GOING ON?
WHO IS IT?

PLEASE, STOP THINKING ABOUT IT.
FT-
IT'S TOO DANGEROUS TO GO OUT NOW. I KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.
hm
FT-
SCRITCH SCRITCH
WE DON'T NEED THAT NOW.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?
ANHALA! WHO IS IT?
OH?
WELL?
WELL?
YES.
WHO IS IT?
AN HOUR?!
ARE YOU SURE, MADAME ANNIE?

YES.
YES.
WE'LL KEEP WAITING.
GOOD-BYE, MADAME ANNIE.
IT'S NOTHING.
THEY'LL BE HERE.
SAMI AND NOUR LEFT MADAME ANNIE'S AN HOUR AGO.
AN HOUR?
AN HOUR?
AN HOUR?
AN HOUR?

AN HOUR?!
YES, IT WAS ANNIE ON THE PHONE.
SHE WANTED TO KNOW IF THEY'D ARRIVED SAFELY.
THEY'RE STILL ON THEIR WAY?
NO DOUBT...
SCRITCH SCRITCH
COME, COME, FARAH, LINDA, SIT DOWN.

MAYBE THEY RAN INTO TROUBLE ON THE WAY.
I'LL GO LOOK FOR THEM!
THAT'S ENOUGH NOW, CHUCRI!

LISTEN UP.
ziiii
ERNEST...
I'LL THANK YOU NOT TO INTERRUPT ME!
YOU HEARD THE RADIO... YOU HEARD THE SHELLS...
I DON'T WANT YOU TO GO OUTSIDE.
PATAP PATAP

WE'VE HAD ENOUGH DEATHS THAT WAY...
SKREEE
I HEAR YOU, ERNEST.
BUT YOU CAN'T ASK ME TO SIT HERE AND DO NOTHING WHEN SAMI AND NOUR MAY NEED HELP!

I'M SORRY TO UPSET YOU...
BUT I HAVE TO GO.

I'LL BE BACK SOON.

AND CHUCRI WENT OUT INTO THE NIGHT.

CLIC
RELAX, ERNEST.
TIC
TOC
COME SIT DOWN!
OFF

TIC
TOC
TIC
TOC
TIC
TOC

TIC
TOC
TIC
TOC
TIC
TOC
TIC
TOC
CLIC

TIC
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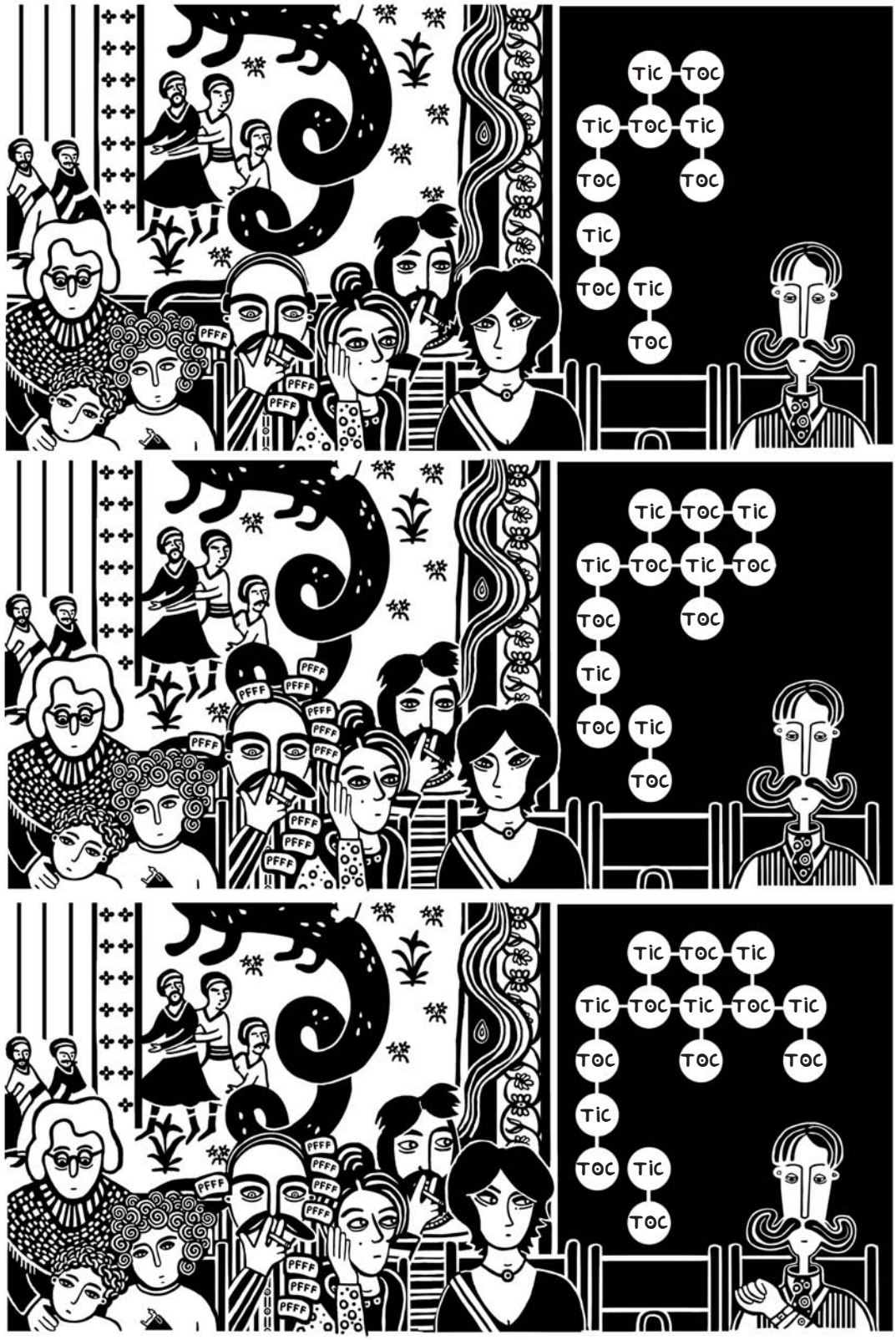
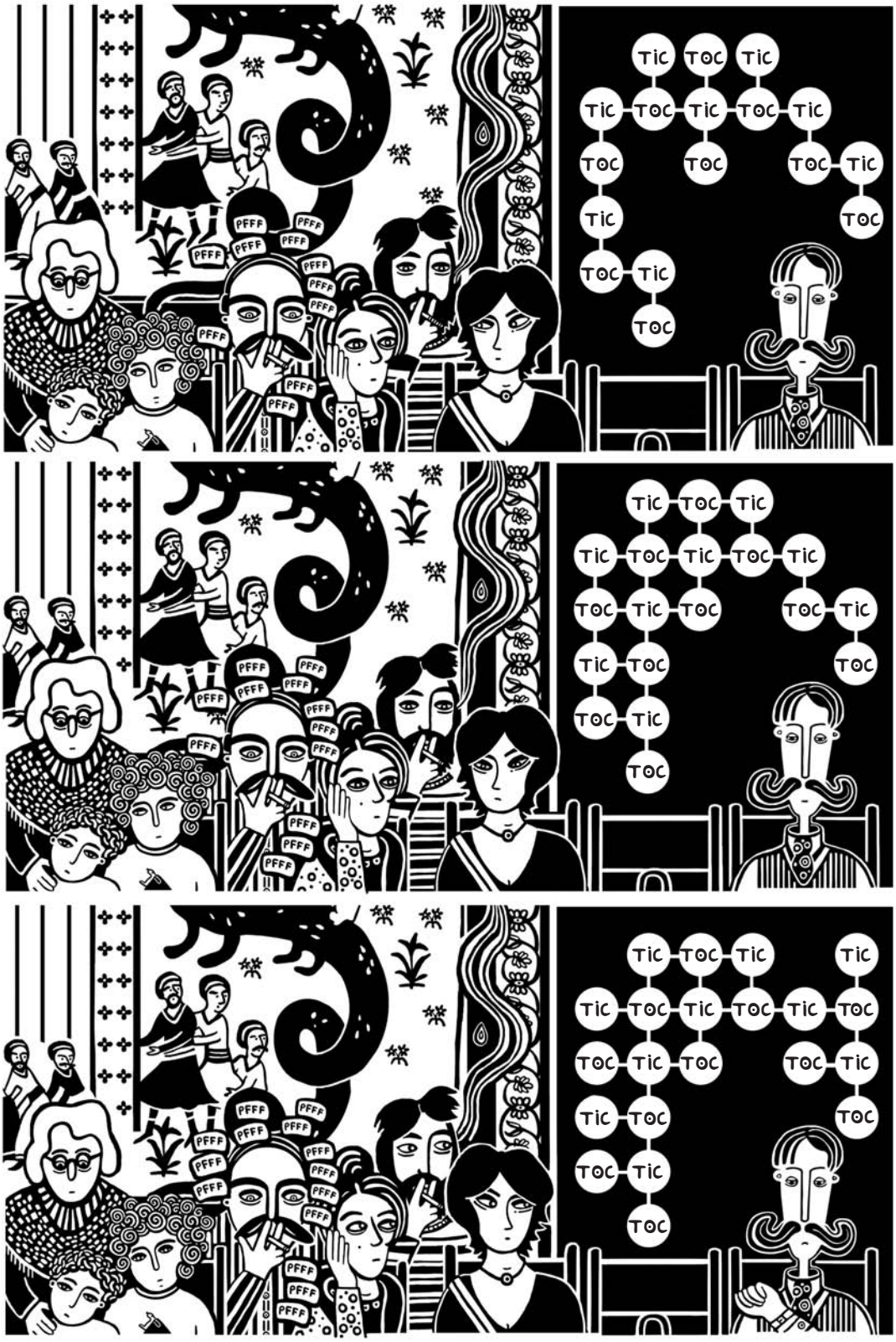
TOC
TIC
TOC
PFFF


PFFF
TIC
TOC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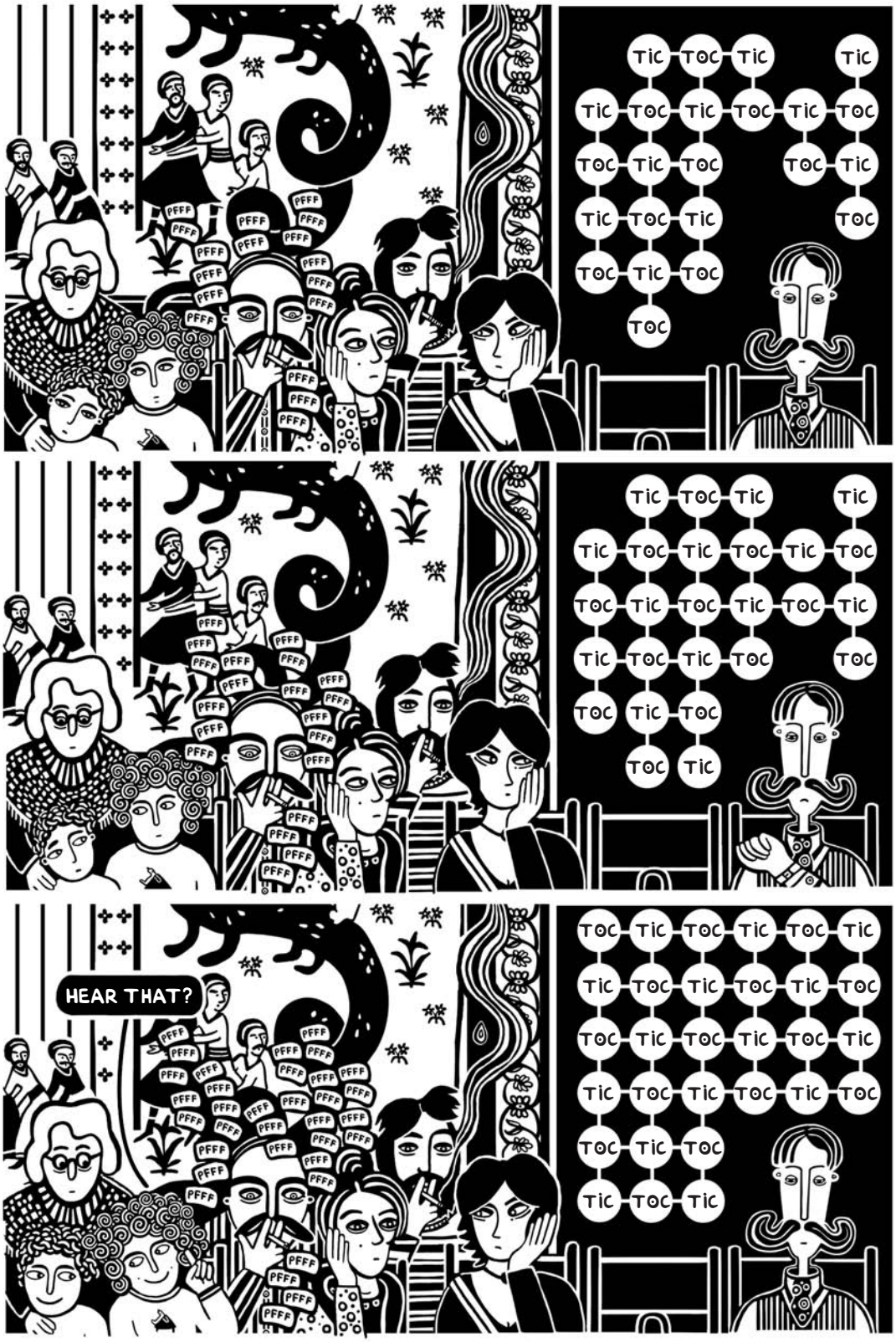
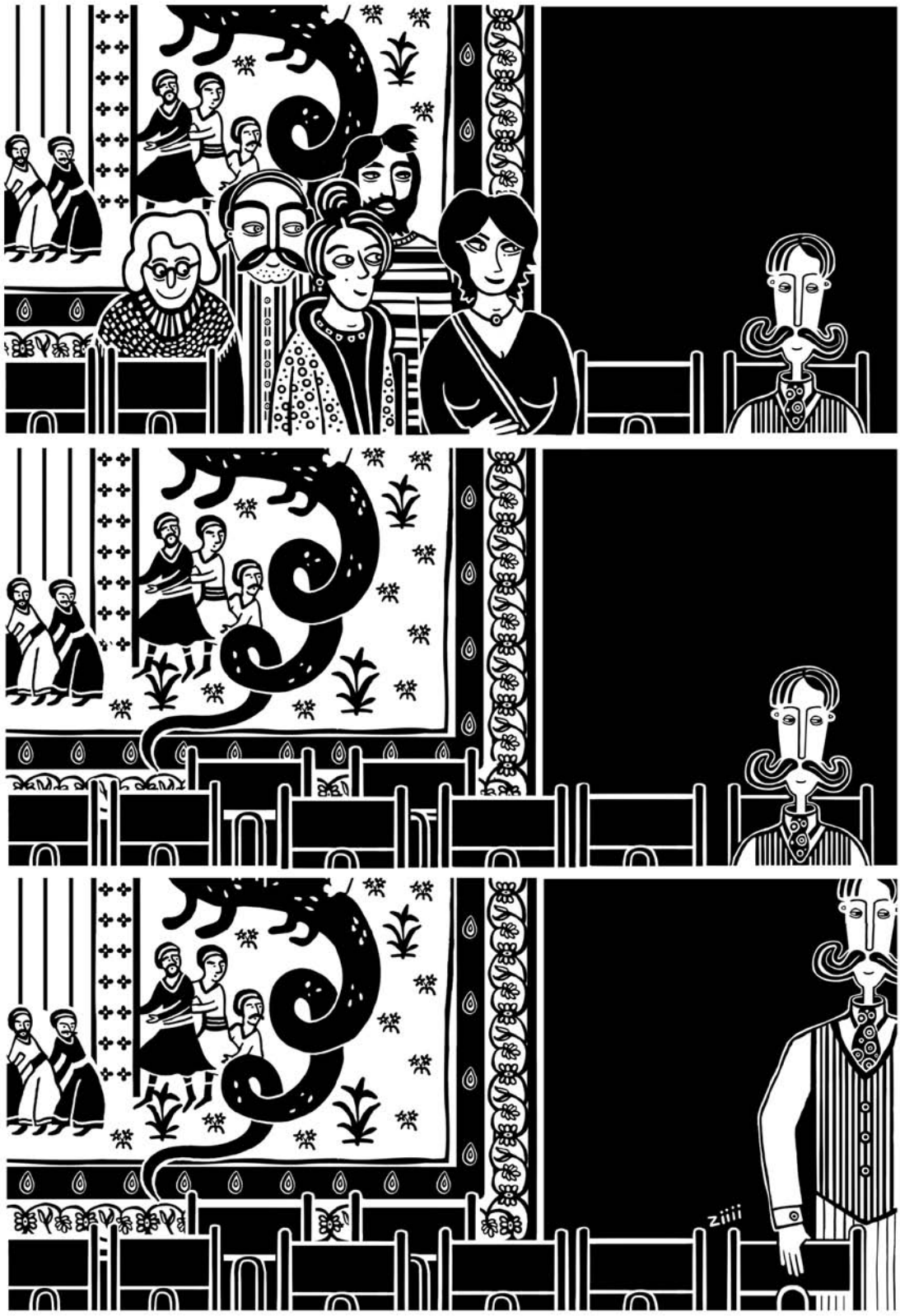

PFFF
TIC
TOC
HEAR THAT?

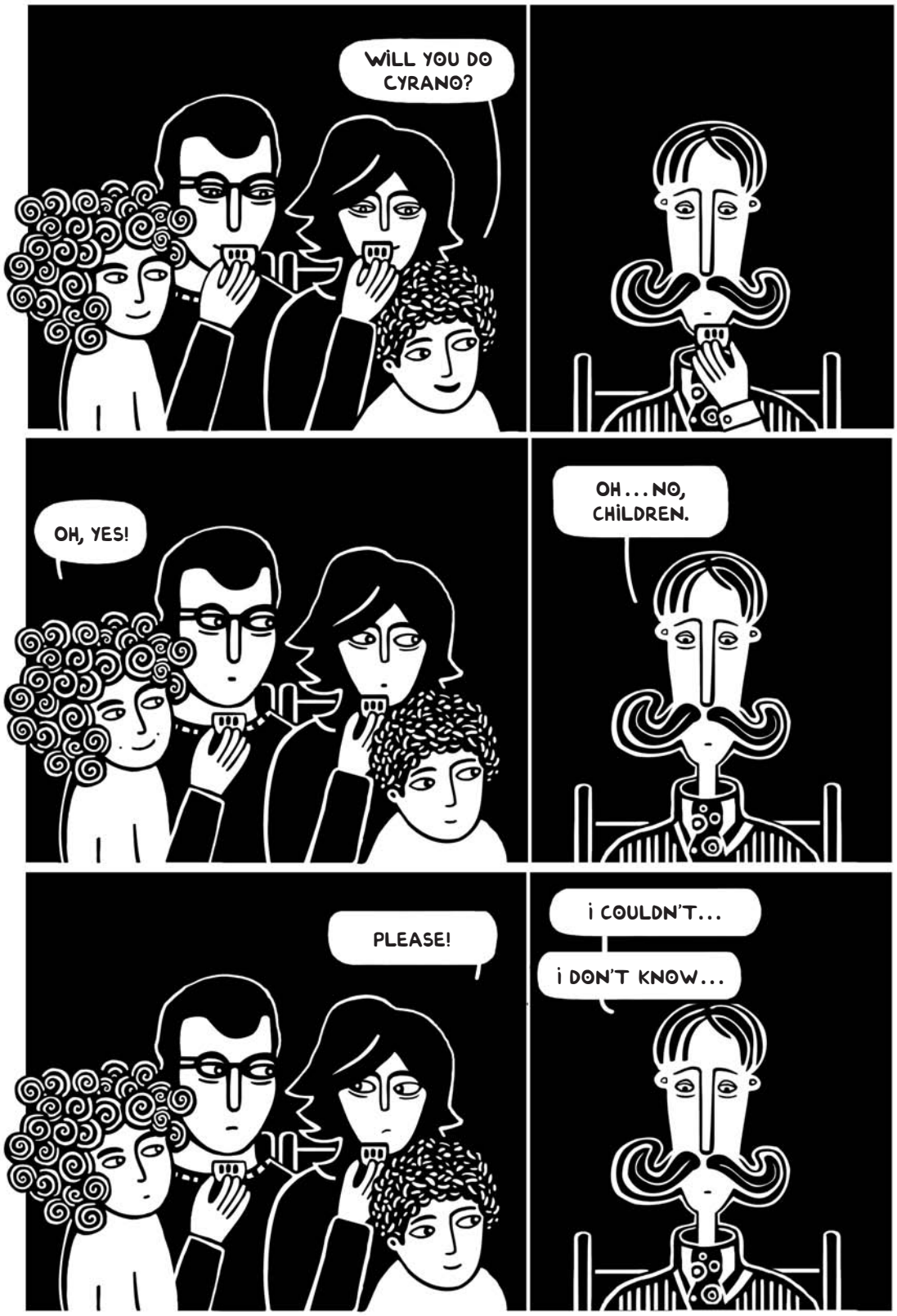
WHEEE
PFFF
AND AT LAST, WE HEARD A KEY TURN IN THE FRONT DOOR LOCK.
WHEEEEEEEEE
WHEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

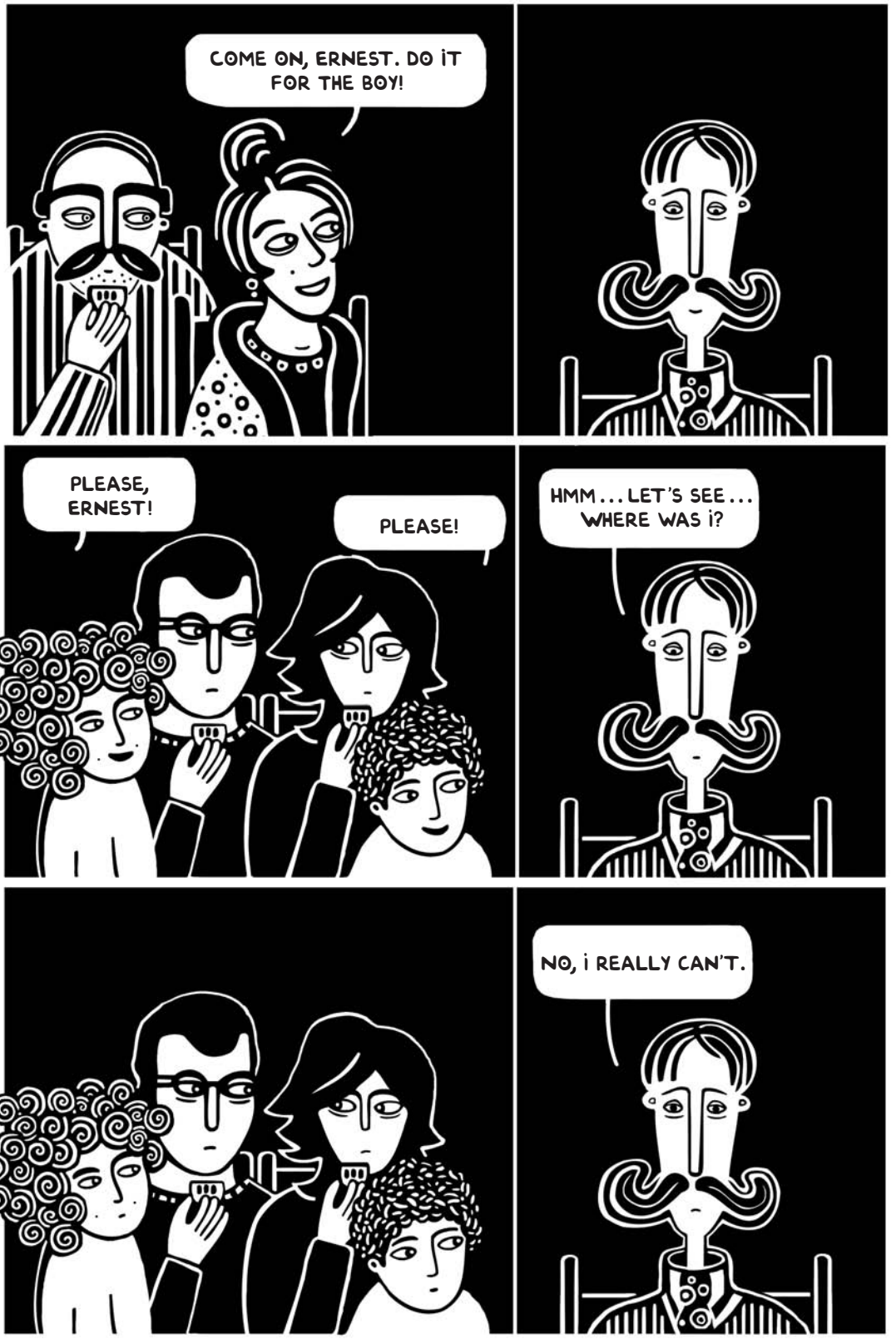

ziiii

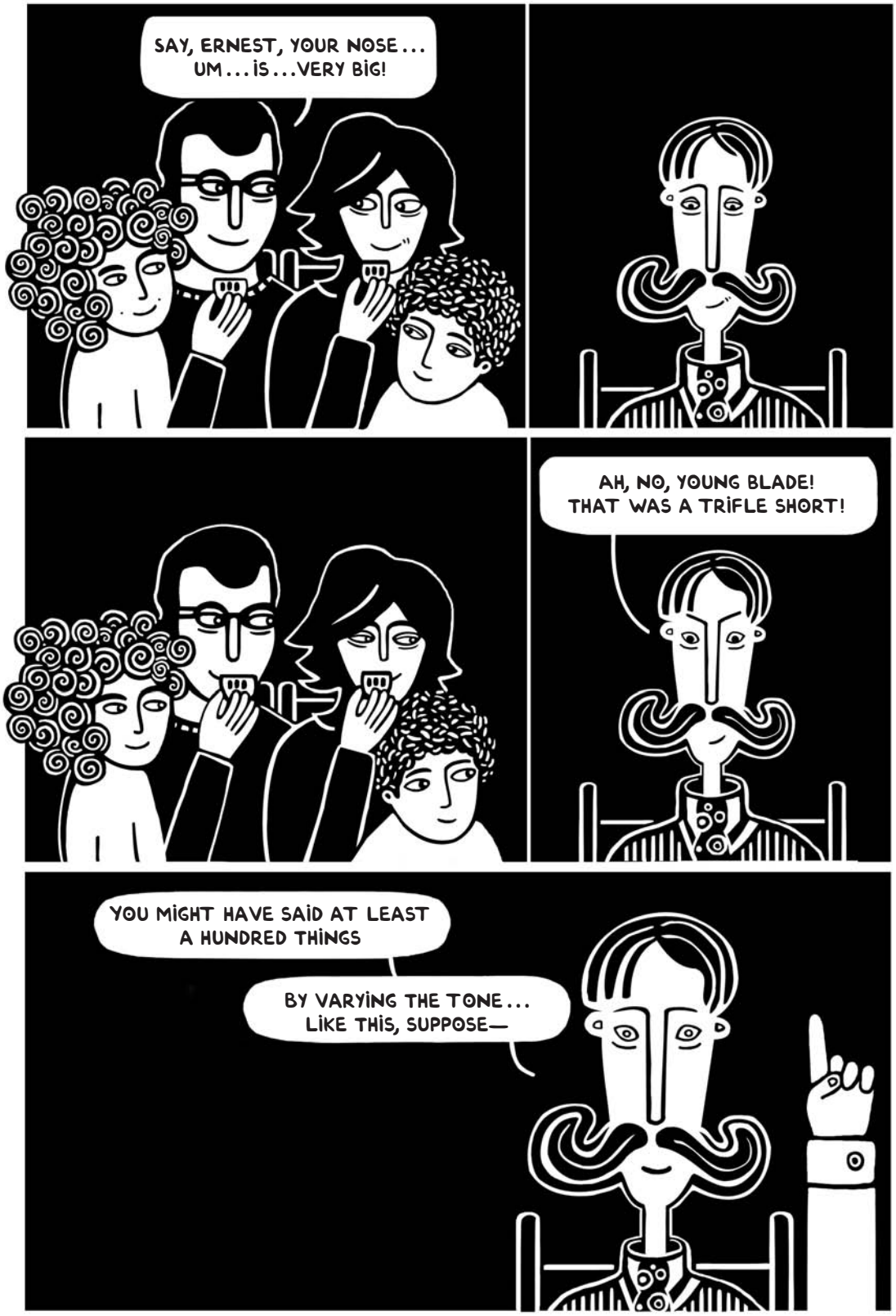
EEEEEEEEE...
YOU DIDN'T RUN INTO CHUCRI?

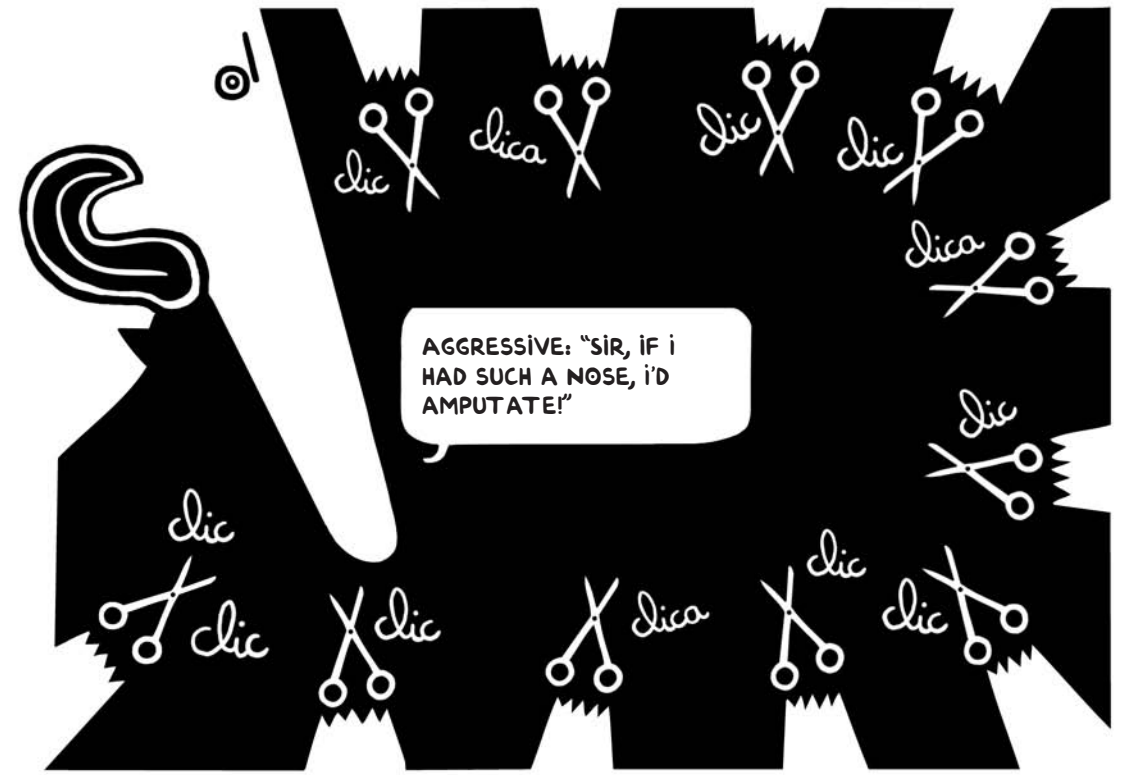
CHUCRİ?
WHAT...
İSN'T HE HERE?
NO.
THAT STUBBORN MULE İNSİSTED ON GOİNG OUT TO FİND YOU.
COME, CHİLDREN, LET'S SİT DOWN. İ'LL MAKE SOME COFFEE!
İ THİNK WE ALL NEED İT.

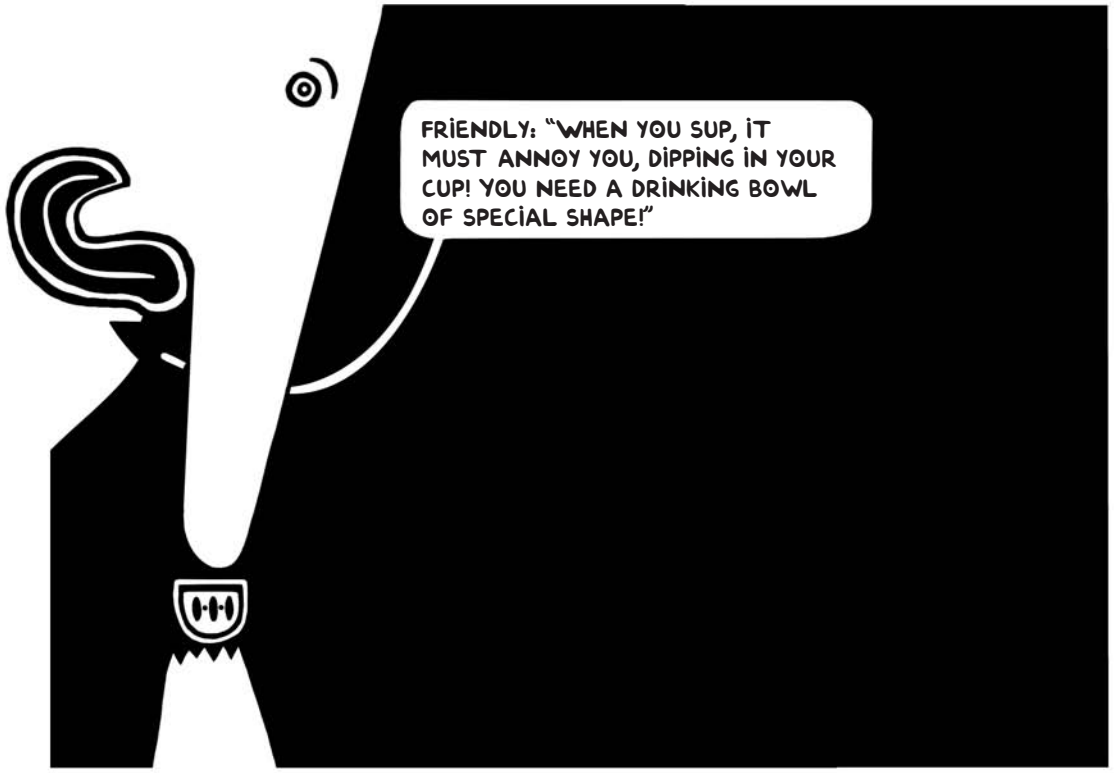
CLIC
SHLLRRP
SHLLRRP
SHLLRRP
SHLLRRP
SHLLRRP
SHLLRRP
SHLLRRP
SHLLRRP
ERNEST?

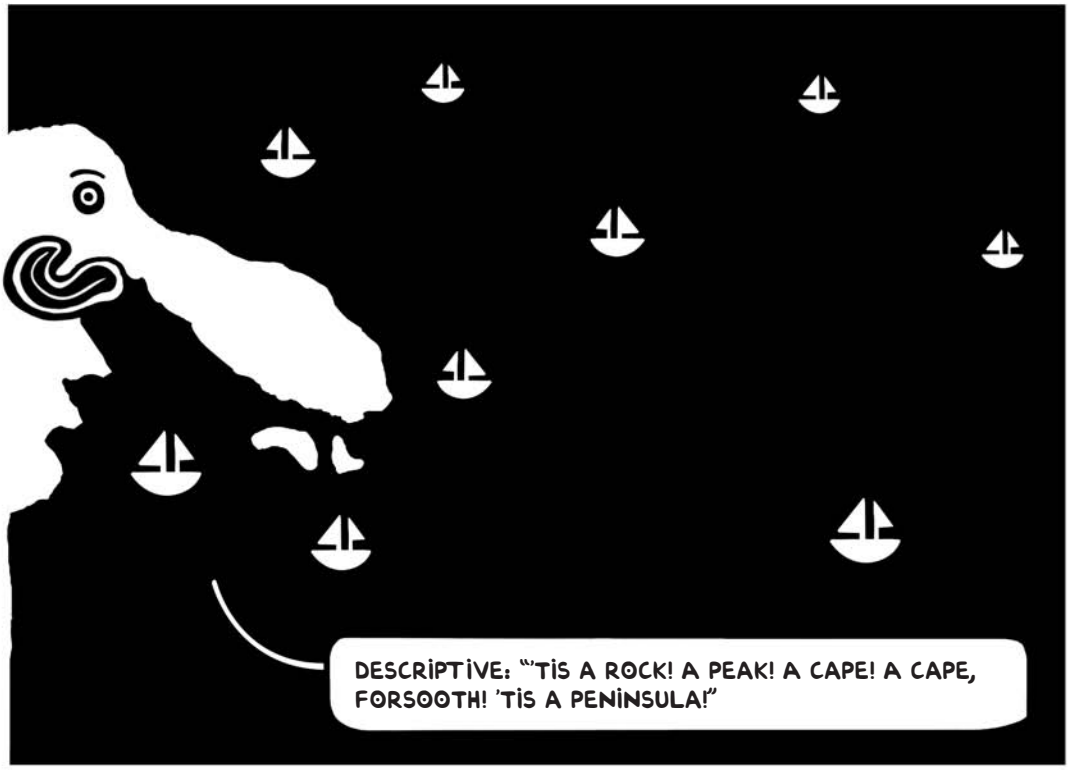

WILL YOU DO CYRANO?
OH, YES!
OH... NO, CHILDREN.
PLEASE!
I COULDN'T...
I DON'T KNOW...


COME ON, ERNEST. DO IT FOR THE BOY!
PLEASE, ERNEST!
PLEASE!
HMM... LET'S SEE... WHERE WAS I?
NO, I REALLY CAN'T.

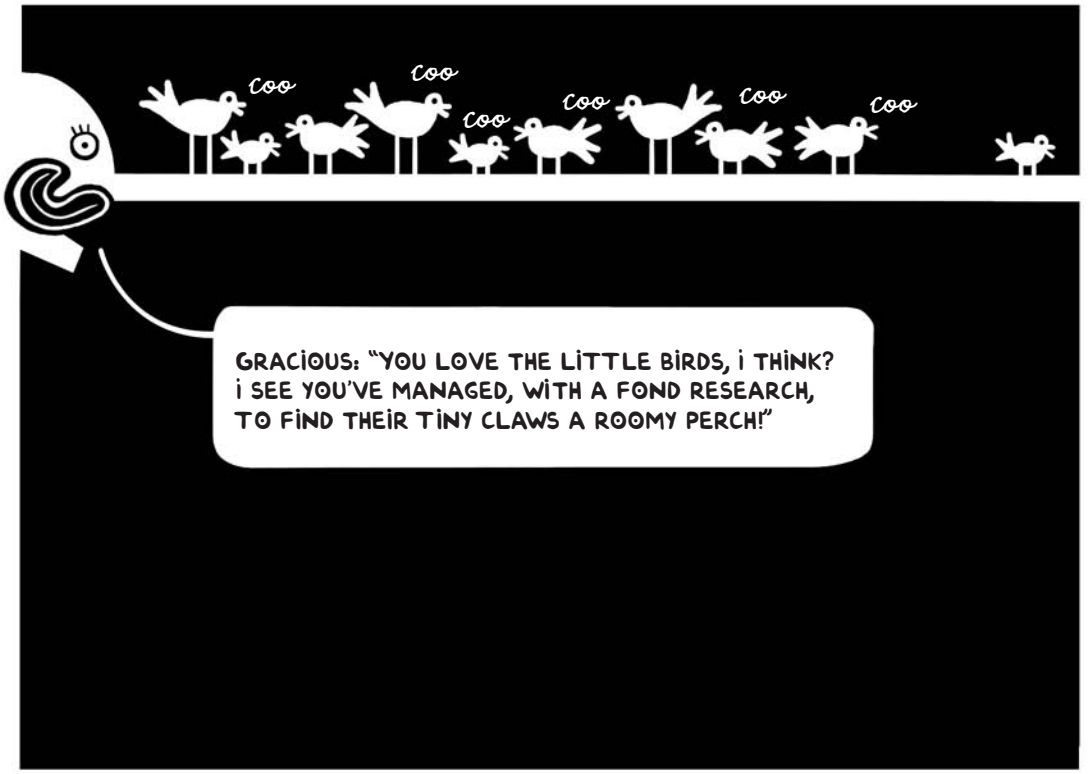

SAY, ERNEST, YOUR NOSE...
UM...IS...VERY BIG!
AH, NO, YOUNG BLADE!
THAT WAS A TRIFLE SHORT!
YOU MIGHT HAVE SAID AT LEAST
A HUNDRED THINGS
BY VARYING THE TONE...
LIKE THIS, SUPPOSE—


clic
clica
clic
clic
clica
AGGRESSIVE: "SIR, IF I HAD SUCH A NOSE, I'D AMPUTATE!"
clic
clic
clic
clic
clica
clic
clic


FRIENDLY: "WHEN YOU SUP, IT MUST ANNOY YOU, DIPPING IN YOUR CUP! YOU NEED A DRINKING BOWL OF SPECIAL SHAPE!"


DESCRIPTIVE: "'TIS A ROCK! A PEAK! A CAPE! A CAPE, FORSOOTH! 'TIS A PENINSULA!"

TENDER: "PRAY GET A SMALL UMBRELLA MADE, LEST ITS BRIGHT COLOR IN THE SUN SHOULD FADE!"


coo
coo
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coo
GRACIOUS: "YOU LOVE THE LITTLE BIRDS, I THINK? I SEE YOU'VE MANAGED, WITH A FOND RESEARCH, TO FIND THEIR TINY CLAWS A ROOMY PERCH!"

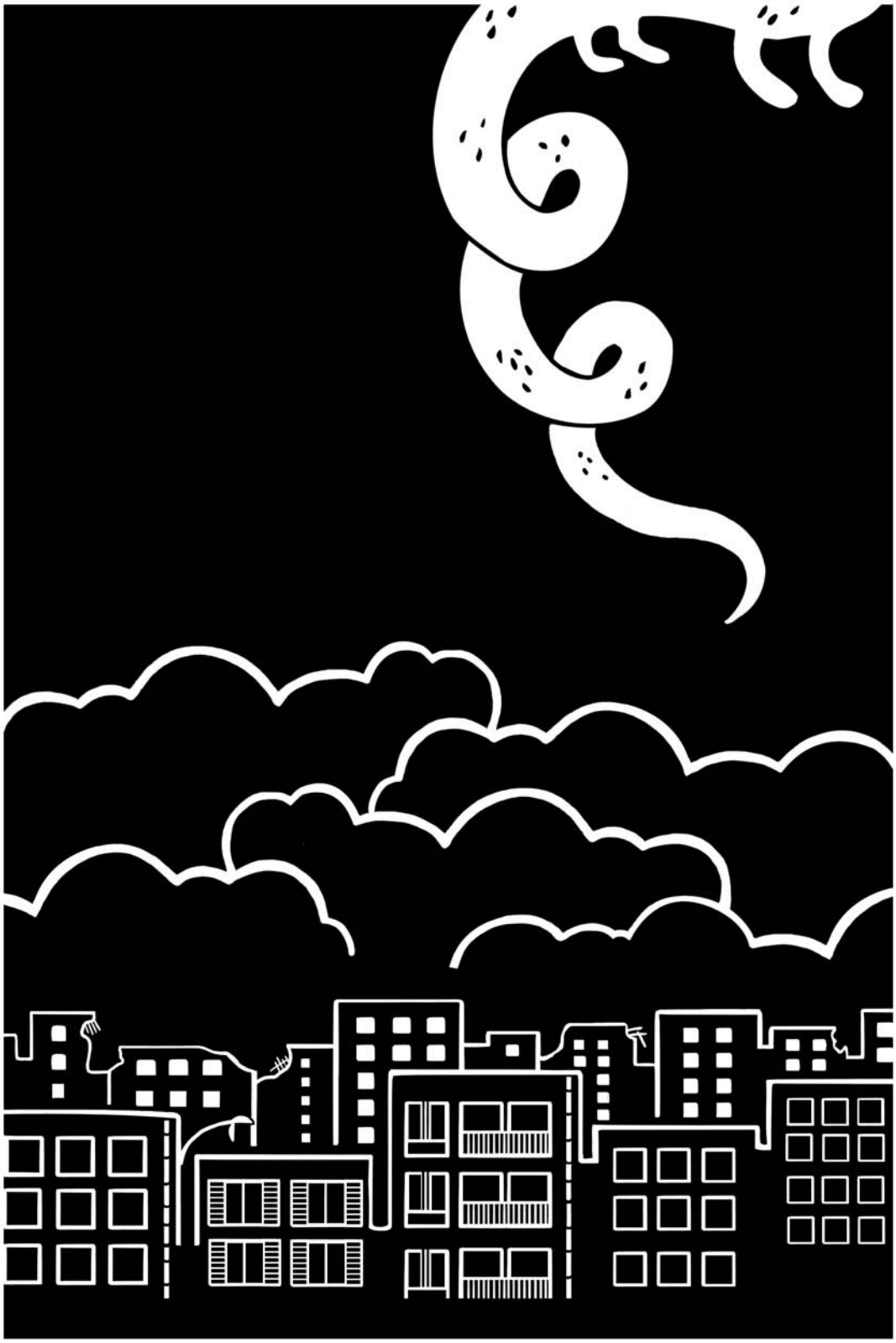
TRUCULENT: "WHEN YOU SMOKE YOUR PIPE, SUPPOSE THAT THE TOBACCO SMOKE SPOUTS FROM YOUR NOSE. DO NOT THE NEIGHBORS, AS THE FUMES RISE HIGHER, CRY TERROR-STRUCK: THE CHIMNEY IS AFIRE?"

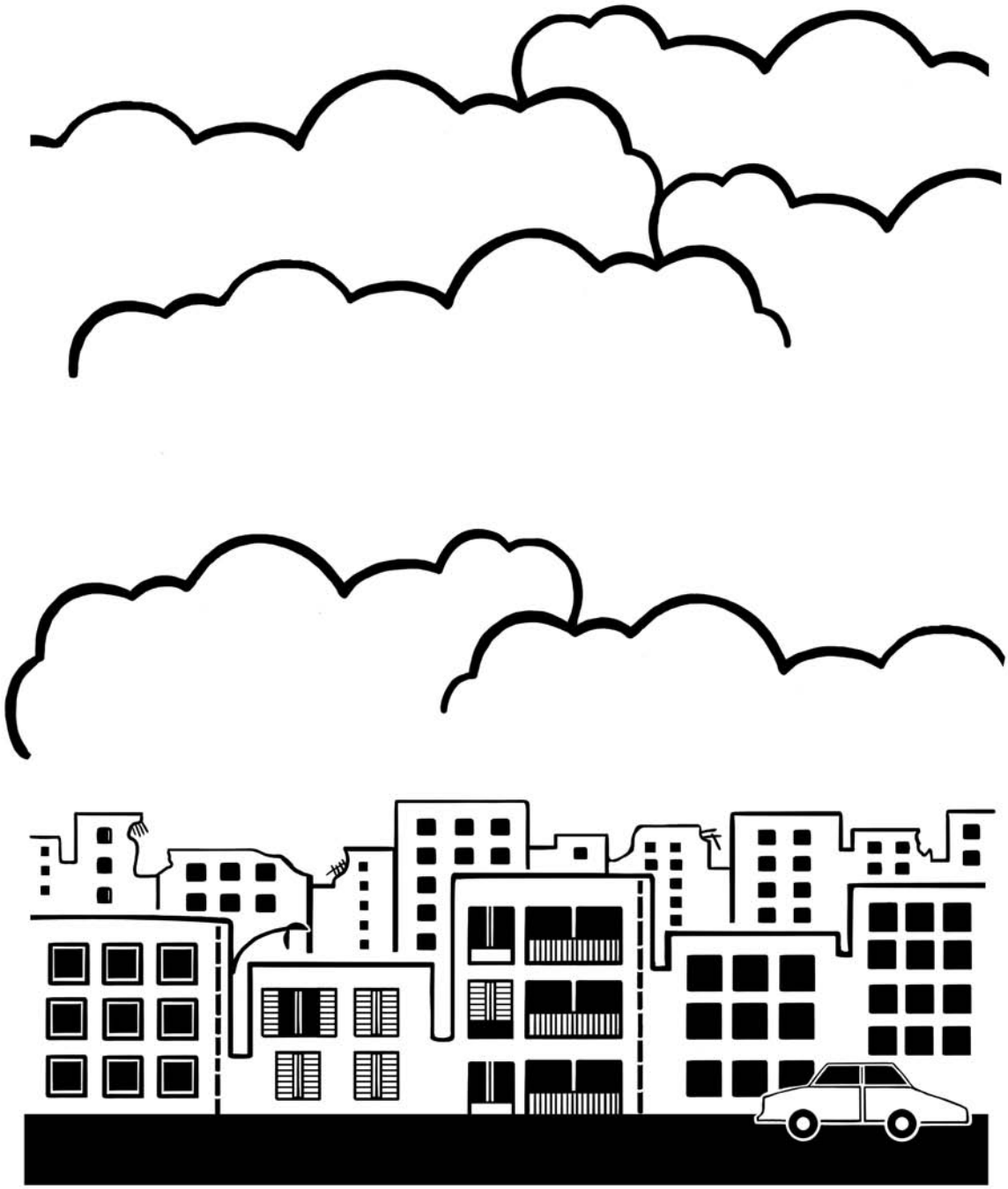
SIMPLE: "WHEN IS THE MONUMENT ON VIEW?"

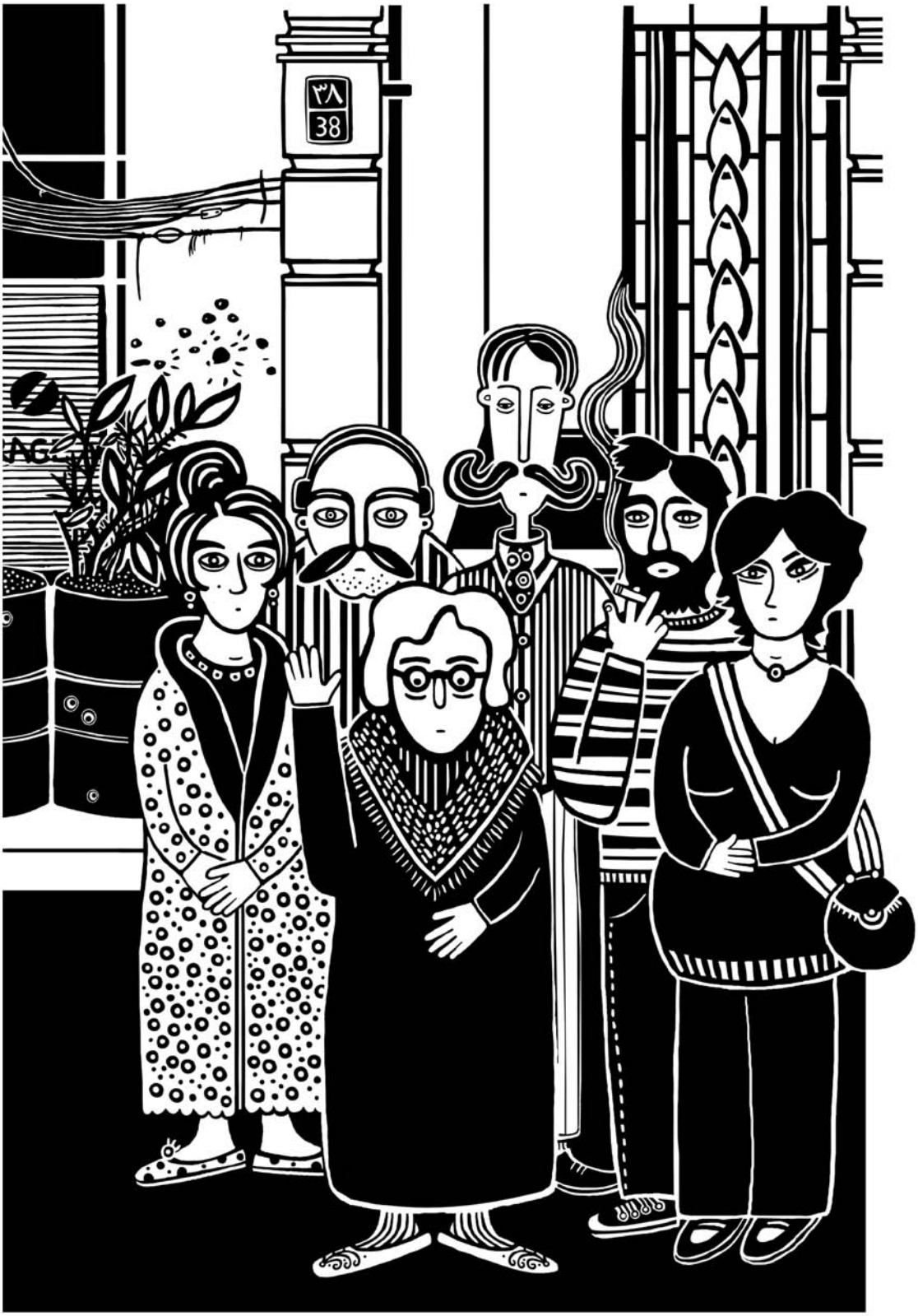
...AND ALL OF A SUDDEN, I HEARD NOTHING AT ALL.

I ONLY FELT SOMEONE LIFT MY CHAIR AND START RUNNING.

A SHELL HAD LANDED IN MY BEDROOM.



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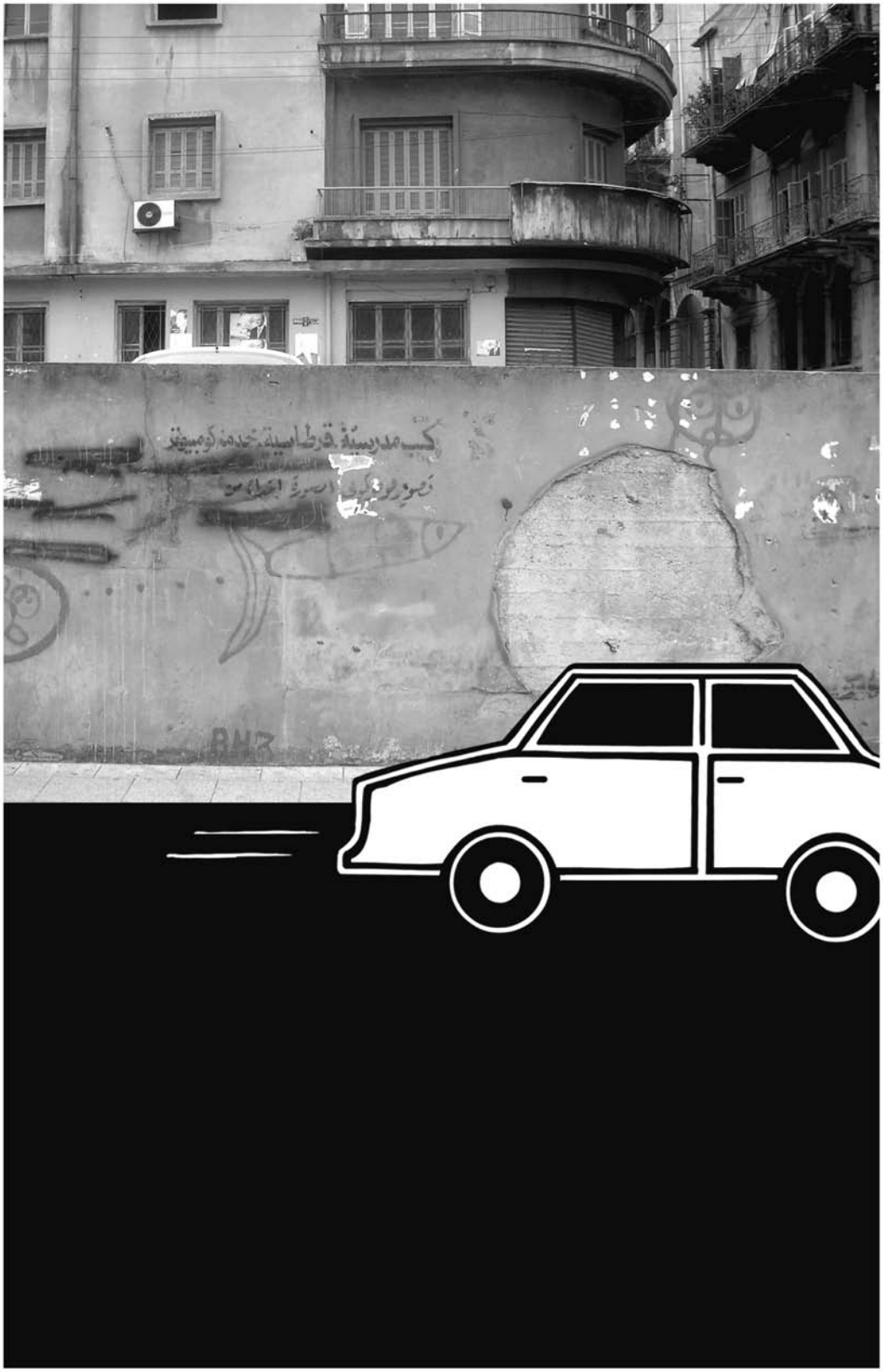
38

RUE 60 | ٦٠ شارع
شارع يوسف سعداني
RUE YOUSSEF SEMAANI
AND THE NEXT MORNING, WE HAD TO LEAVE.

TO DIE TO LEAVE TO RETURN
IT'S A GAME FOR SWALLOWS
—FLORIAN


كب مدرسة قرطاسية خدمة كومبيوتر
BHR

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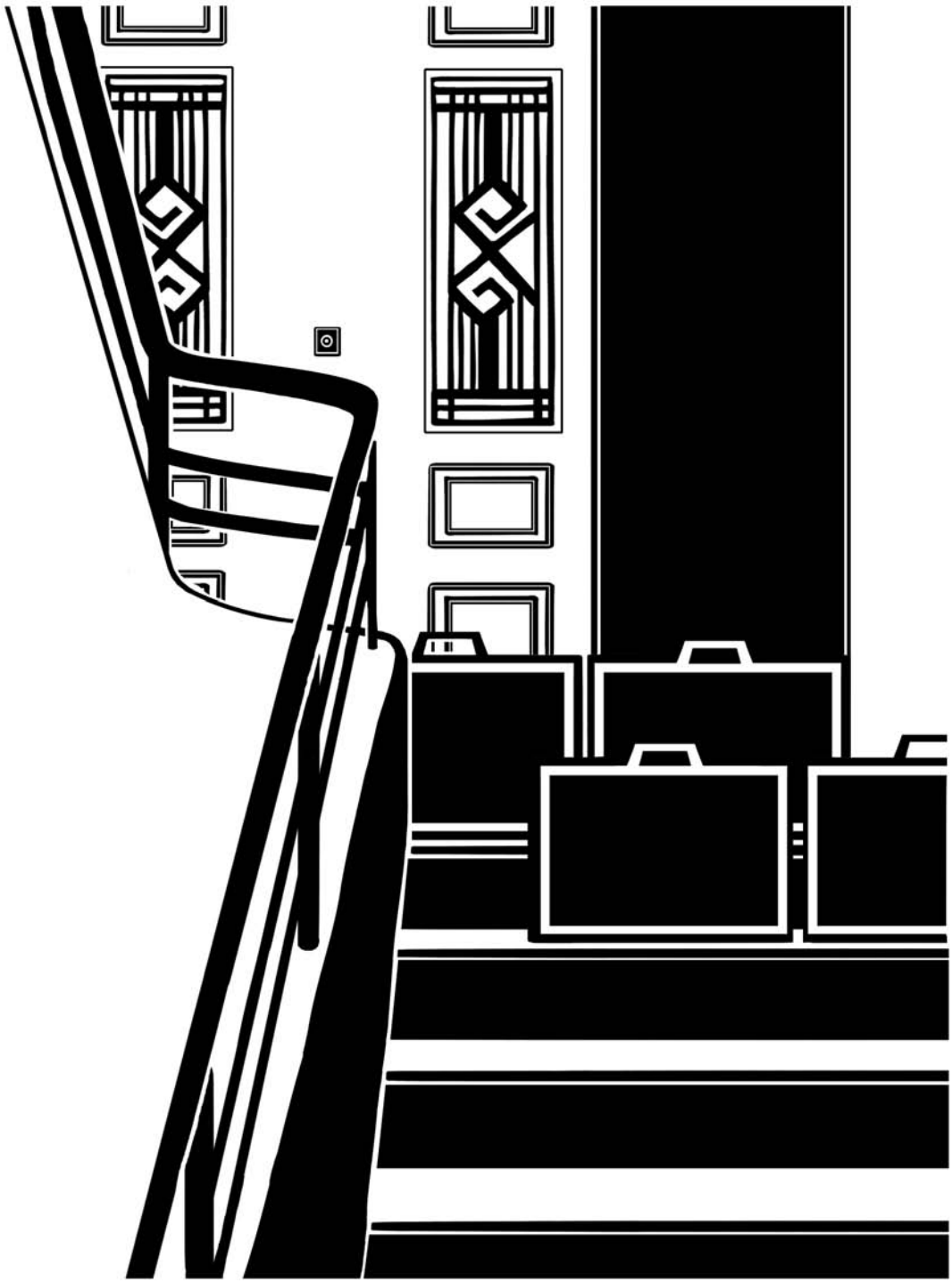
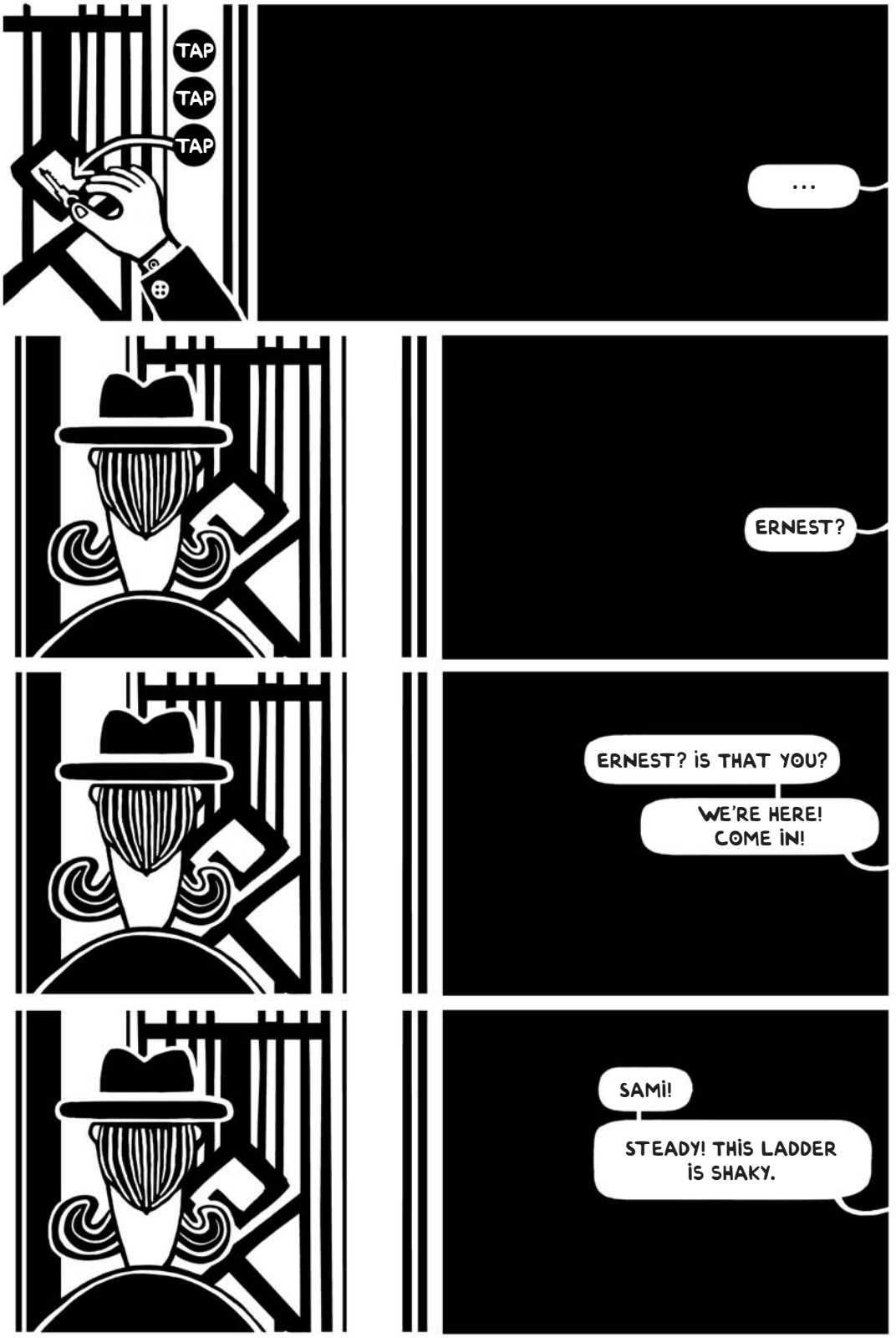
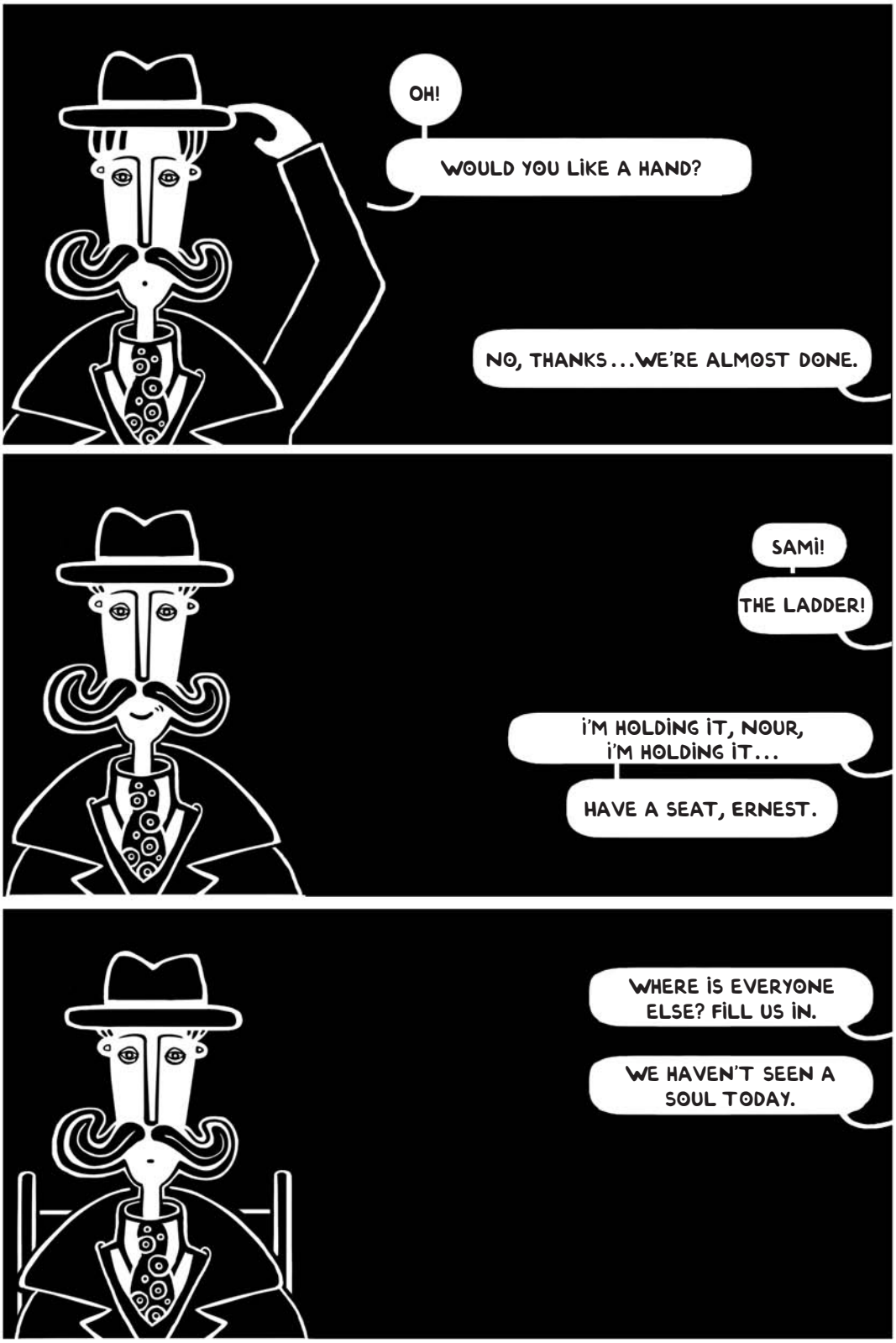
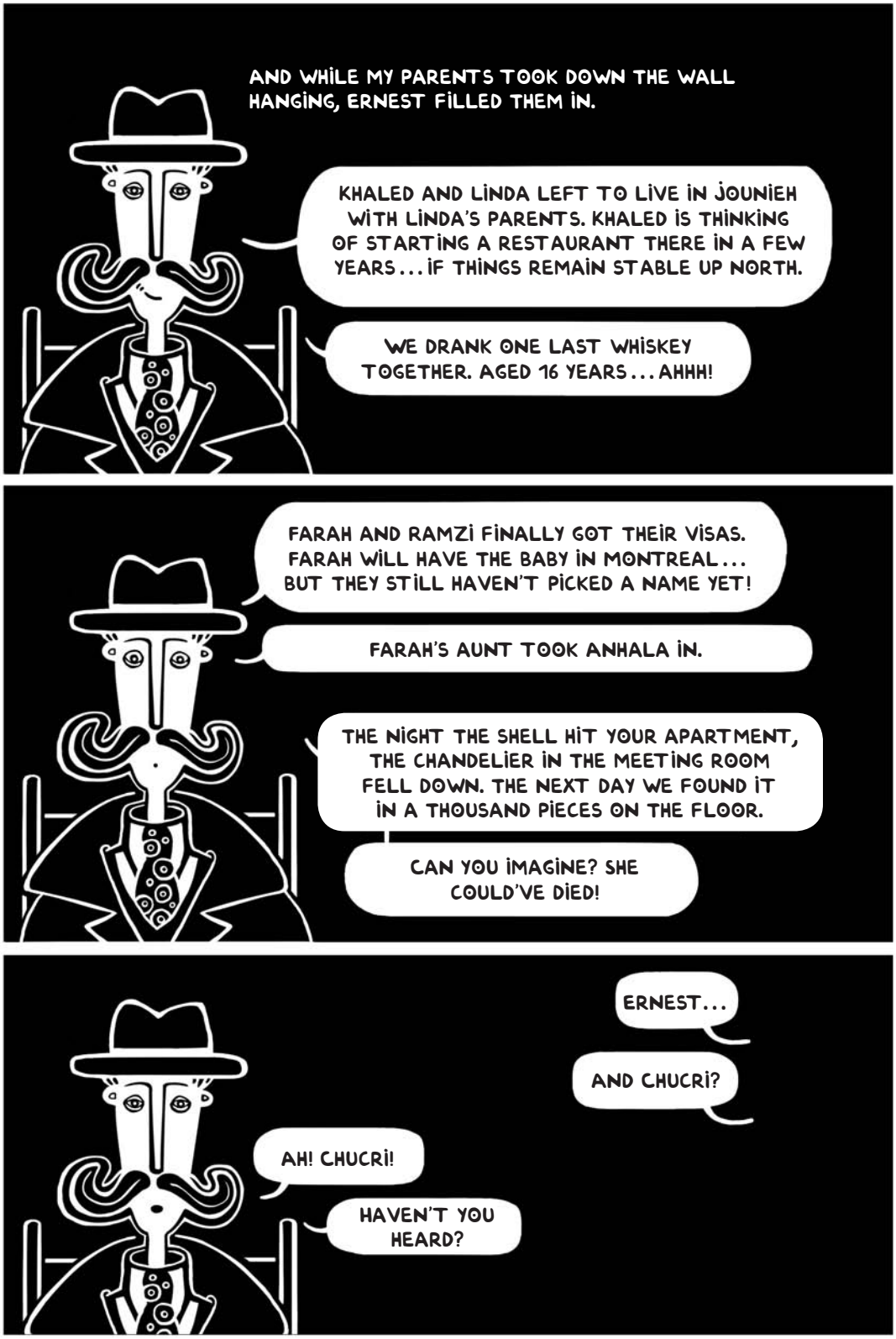
A WEEK LATER, MY PARENTS WENT BACK TO OUR APARTMENT TO GATHER A FEW THINGS.

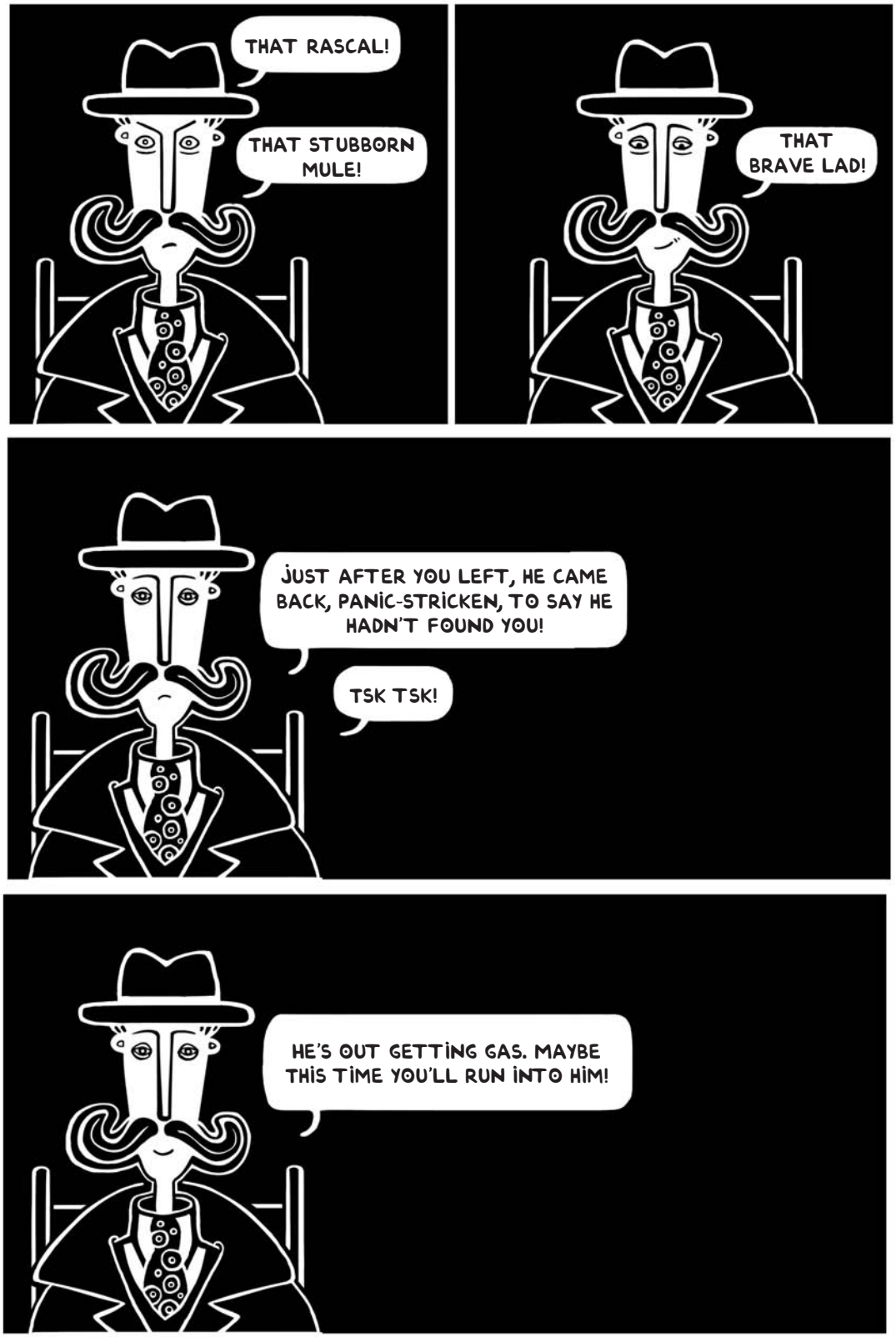
THE BUILDING WAS EMPTY.

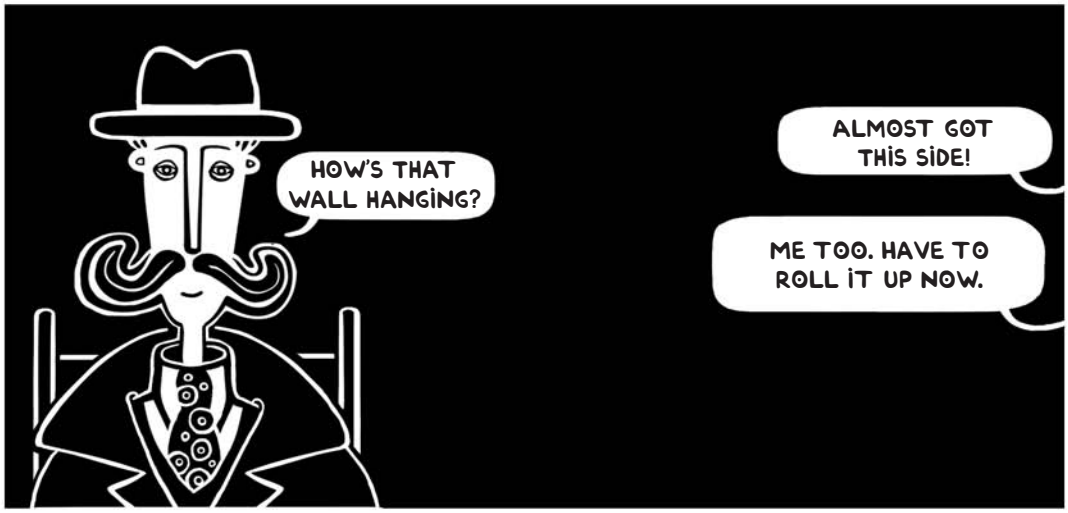


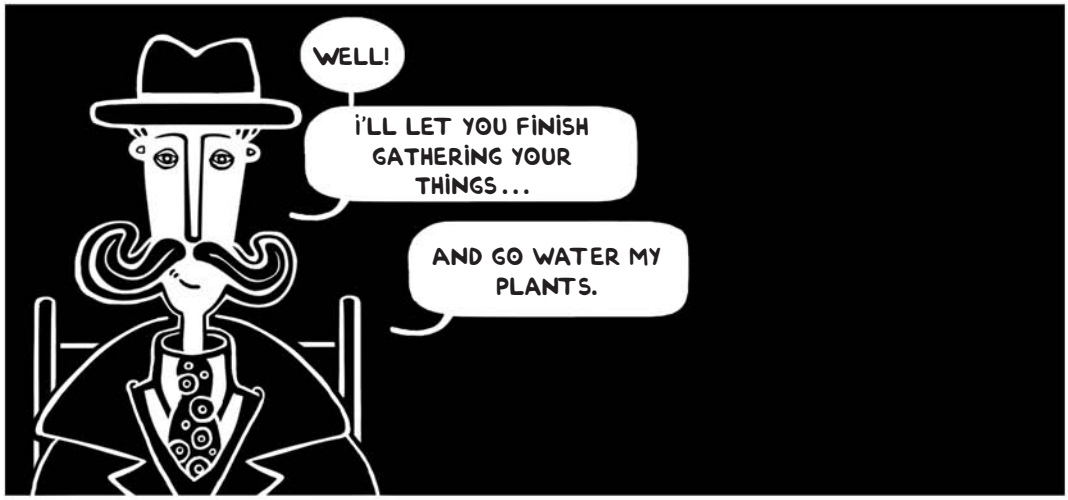

TAP
TAP
TAP
...
ERNEST?
ERNEST? IS THAT YOU?
WE'RE HERE! COME IN!
SAMI!
STEADY! THIS LADDER IS SHAKY.


OH!
WOULD YOU LIKE A HAND?
NO, THANKS...WE'RE ALMOST DONE.
SAMI!
THE LADDER!
I'M HOLDING IT, NOUR, I'M HOLDING IT...
HAVE A SEAT, ERNEST.
WHERE IS EVERYONE ELSE? FILL US IN.
WE HAVEN'T SEEN A SOUL TODAY.

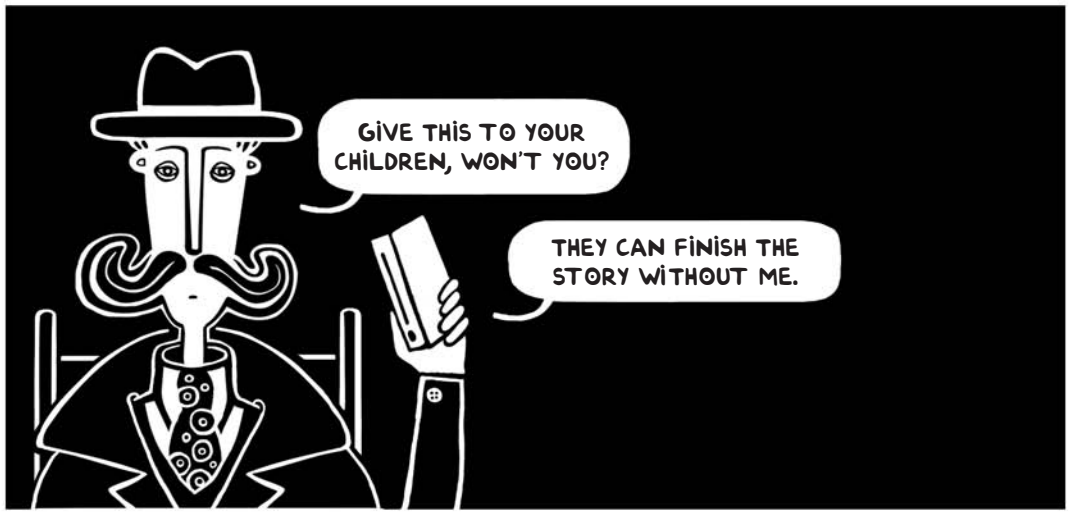

AND WHILE MY PARENTS TOOK DOWN THE WALL HANGING, ERNEST FILLED THEM IN.
KHALED AND LINDA LEFT TO LIVE IN JOUNIEH WITH LINDA'S PARENTS. KHALED IS THINKING OF STARTING A RESTAURANT THERE IN A FEW YEARS... IF THINGS REMAIN STABLE UP NORTH.
WE DRANK ONE LAST WHISKEY TOGETHER. AGED 16 YEARS... AHHH!
FARAH AND RAMZI FINALLY GOT THEIR VISAS. FARAH WILL HAVE THE BABY IN MONTREAL... BUT THEY STILL HAVEN'T PICKED A NAME YET!
FARAH'S AUNT TOOK ANHALA IN.
THE NIGHT THE SHELL HIT YOUR APARTMENT, THE CHANDELIER IN THE MEETING ROOM FELL DOWN. THE NEXT DAY WE FOUND IT IN A THOUSAND PIECES ON THE FLOOR.
CAN YOU IMAGINE? SHE COULD'VE DIED!
ERNEST...
AND CHUCRI?
AH! CHUCRI!
HAVEN'T YOU HEARD?

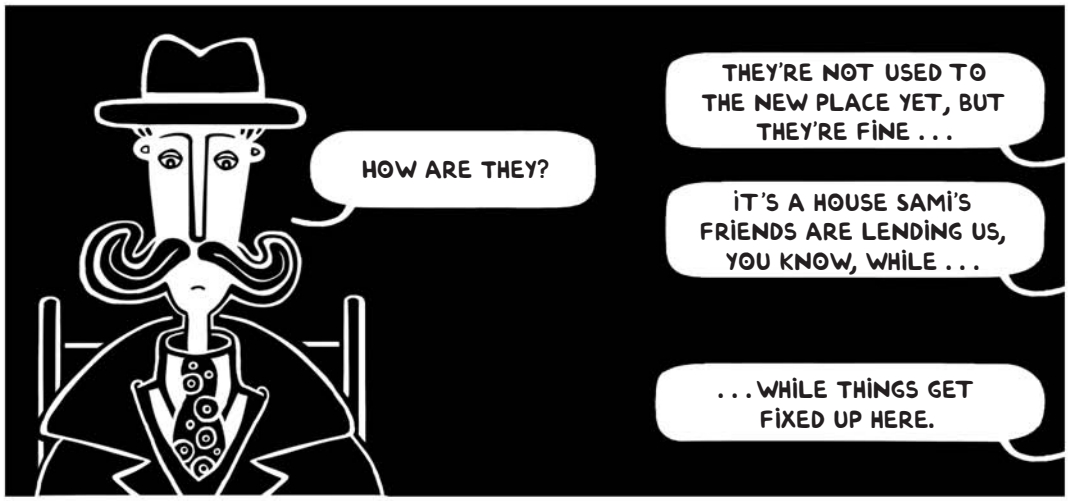

THAT RASCAL!
THAT STUBBORN MULE!
THAT BRAVE LAD!
JUST AFTER YOU LEFT, HE CAME BACK, PANIC-STRICKEN, TO SAY HE HADN'T FOUND YOU!
TSK TSK!
HE'S OUT GETTING GAS. MAYBE THIS TIME YOU'LL RUN INTO HIM!


HOW'S THAT WALL HANGING?
ALMOST GOT THIS SIDE!
ME TOO. HAVE TO ROLL IT UP NOW.

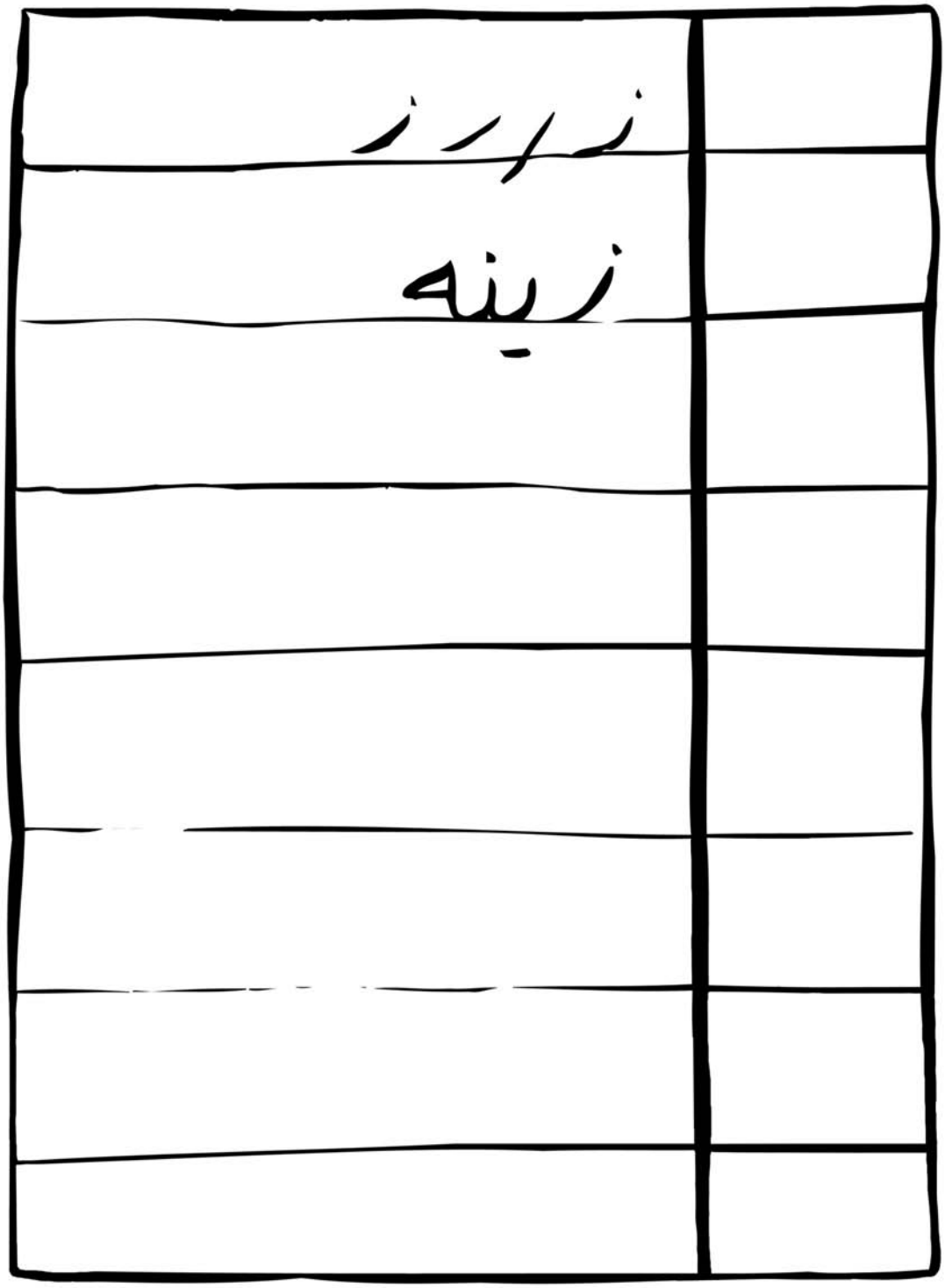

WELL!
I'LL LET YOU FINISH GATHERING YOUR THINGS...
AND GO WATER MY PLANTS.

COME SAY GOOD-BYE BEFORE YOU GO.


GIVE THIS TO YOUR CHILDREN, WON'T YOU?
THEY CAN FINISH THE STORY WITHOUT ME.

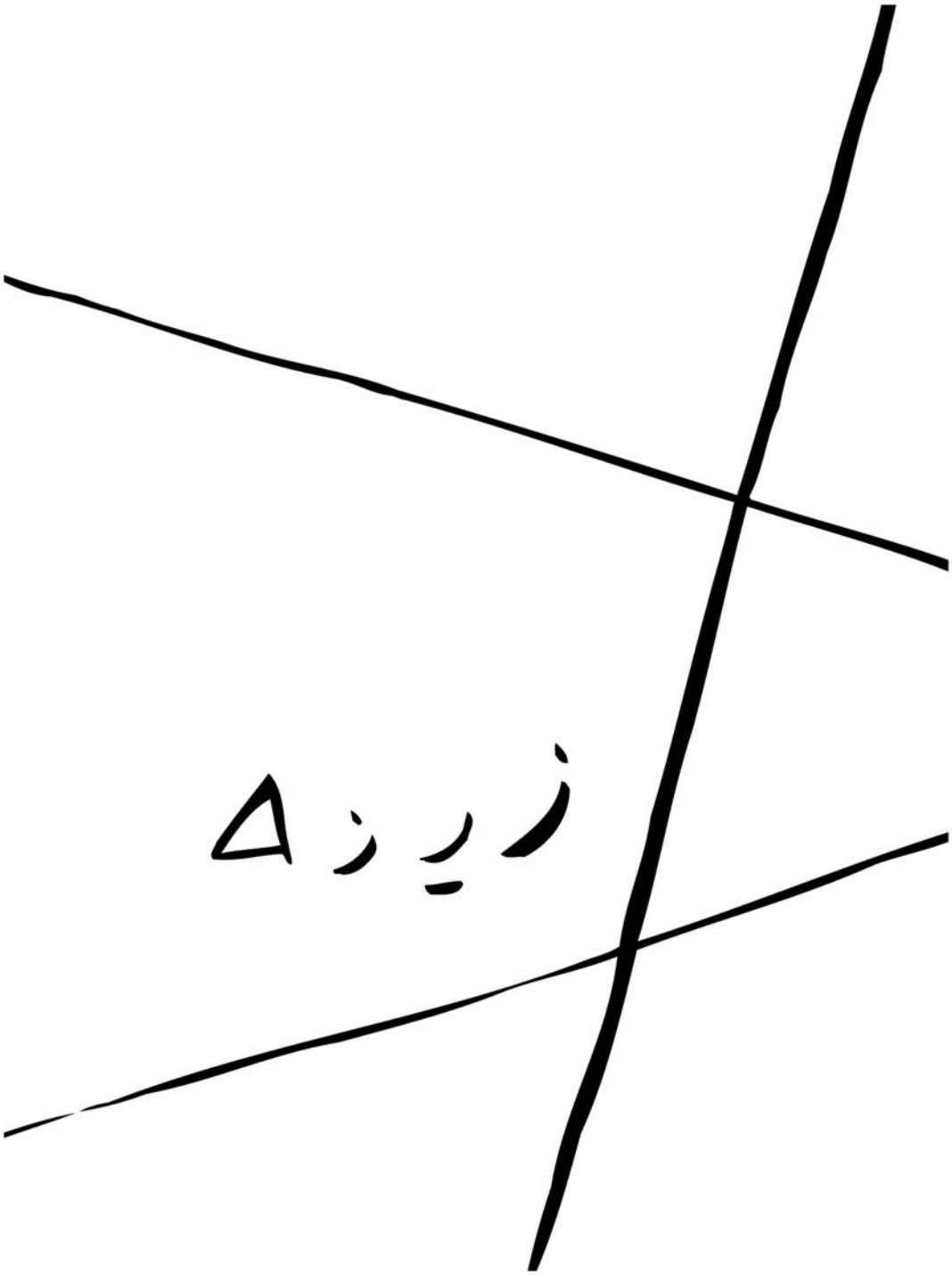

HOW ARE THEY?
THEY'RE NOT USED TO THE NEW PLACE YET, BUT THEY'RE FINE . . .
IT'S A HOUSE SAMI'S FRIENDS ARE LENDING US, YOU KNOW, WHILE . . .
. . . WHILE THINGS GET FIXED UP HERE.

hm
THEY'LL GET USED TO IT...



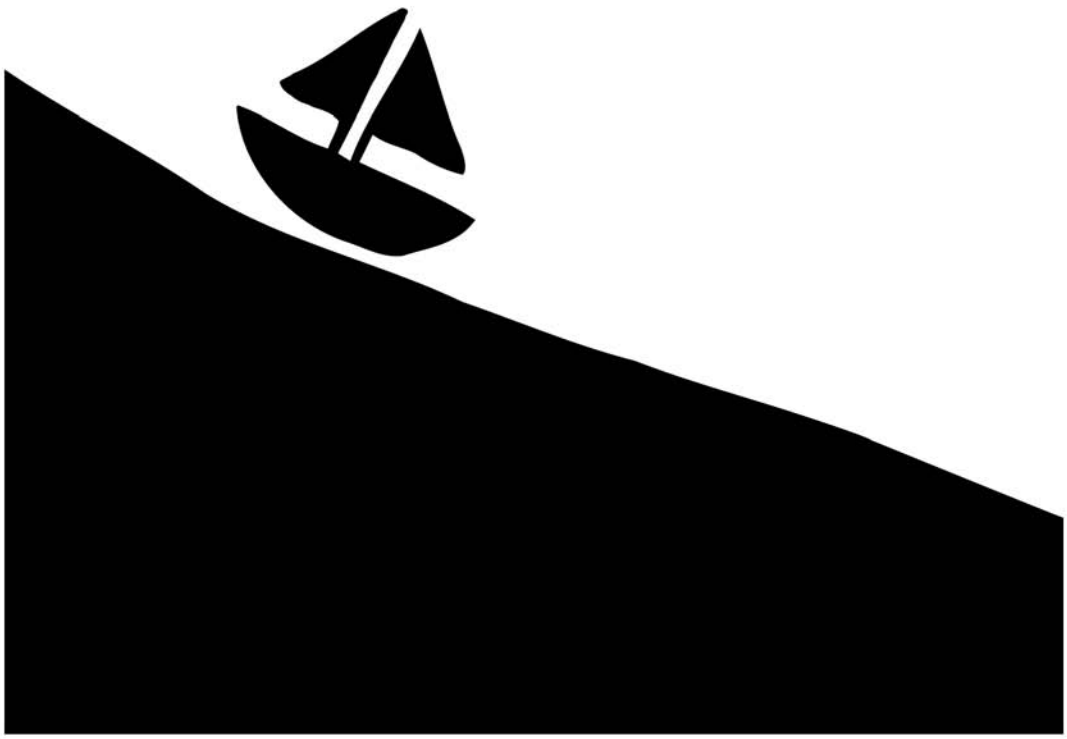
MY FATHER READ US THE REST OF *CYRANO* IN THAT HOUSE.
A YEAR LATER, I LEARNED TO WRITE MY NAME.

AND THEN,



ONCE MORE,

WE HAD



TO LEAVE.

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FOR PAP AND MAM
FOR PHILIPPE

FOR ERNEST

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zeina Abirached was born in Beirut in 1981 in the middle of the civil war, and was ten years old when it finally ended. She studied graphic arts and commercial design at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA) and in 2002 was awarded the top prize at the International Comic Book Festival in Beirut for her first graphic novel, *Beyrouth-Catharsis*. She moved to Paris in 2004, where she attended the National School of Decorative Arts. In 2006, she published her two graphic novels in French with the publisher Cambourakis, and the next year her short animated film, *Mouton* (*Sheep*), received a prize nomination during the 5th Tehran International Animation Festival.

While surfing a French online news archive, she came across a television documentary made in Beirut in 1984. The reporters were interviewing the residents of a street near the demarcation line that cut the city in two. A woman whose home had been hit by the bombings spoke a single sentence that startled her: "You know, I think maybe we're still more or less safe here."

That woman was her grandmother. At that moment, she knew she had to tell the story of their lives in Beirut.

ZEINA ABIRACHED WAS BORN IN BEIRUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CIVIL WAR AND WAS TEN YEARS OLD WHEN IT FINALLY ENDED. IN 2003, SHE WAS AWARDED THE TOP PRIZE AT THE BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL COMIC BOOK FESTIVAL FOR HER FIRST GRAPHIC NOVEL, *BEYROUTH-CATHARSIS*. SHE MOVED TO PARIS IN 2004 TO ATTEND THE NATIONAL SCHOOL OF DECORATIVE ARTS.

IN 2006, WHILE SEARCHING A FRENCH ONLINE NEWS ARCHIVE, SHE CAME ACROSS A TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY MADE IN BEIRUT IN 1984. A WOMAN WHOSE HOME HAD BEEN HIT BY THE BOMBINGS SPOKE A SINGLE, STARTLING SENTENCE: "YOU KNOW, I THINK MAYBE WE'RE STILL MORE OR LESS SAFE HERE." THAT WOMAN WAS HER GRANDMOTHER. AT THAT MOMENT, SHE KNEW SHE HAD TO TELL THEIR STORY.

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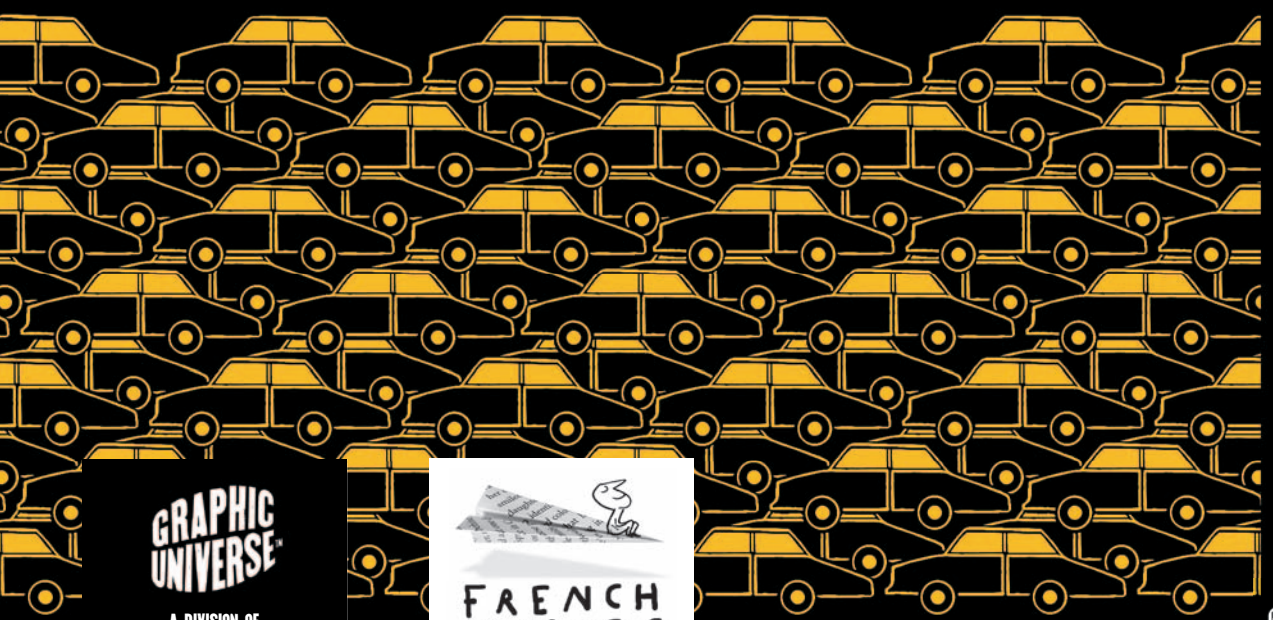

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